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AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

BY

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PREFACE

The recent abundance of reprints and translations marks a second approach toward the recovery of the middle age. While the previous generation of historians was dispelling the legendary darkness of this dark age, the critics turned the connotation of *Gothic* from pity to praise. Pity for the middle age became so antiquated that enthusiasts ventured even to demand worship instead. What remained for our time was more exact appreciation through an increasing availability of medieval literature. To the widely interesting body of literature now at hand in English I have tried here to furnish a students' guide. This book is not for scholars. They are provided already. What seemed to be lacking was such a brief manual as should open the main literary significances to students not specially trained. Therefore, though the discussion necessarily includes works written in Latin and Old French, and relies, of course, on foreign as well as English scholarship, the citations and the suggestions for further study are generally limited to works accessible in English. What I have thus tried to provide is, not a substitute for close study, but an introduction.

Meantime even a general survey of English medieval literature corrects perspective. The larger literary interests and habits of the time, even when some of them are discerned through translations, open the way for truer appreciation of later interests. For the comprehension of later, more complex forms also, the best preparation is study of the earlier and simpler forms. To this end I have made

some imitative renderings, not under an hallucination of reproducing the original poetry, but in the conviction that of the elements composing literary connotation the most suggestive in translation is the habit of rhythm. Passing from translation through annotated extracts to the discussion of original texts, I have sought to persuade my readers that Middle English is not altogether beyond them, and that it is too interesting and significant to be slurred.

The frontiers of literature are so broad that no single discussion, whatever its length, can hope to be exhaustive. Though medieval literature is inseparable from medieval theology and sociology, this larger view is hardly furthered by presenting all three at once. The necessity of holding to one aspect becomes a virtue in so far as it leads a student of literature to begin with literature itself; not with biography, nor even with history, but with that expression of truth which has endured because of its beauty; not with the poet, but with the poem. To such an approach we are further invited by the scantiness of medieval biography. The middle age apparently thought of biography as belonging rather to men of action than to men of letters; and this idea, in spite of our modern curiosity, is still suggestive of due proportion. The necessity of beginning with *Piers Plowman* itself, for lack of any certain knowledge of its author, suggests a sound order of study. In another way also my discussion is strictly limited. Many works are deliberately omitted in order that the significant few may stand out. For this book is meant to be neither a history nor a directory, but a guide to the appreciation of medieval literature.

My Columbia colleagues have given me unstinted time. Professor Matthews, after entering sympathetically into the original idea, took pains to reappraise the whole scope

and method. That this was carried beyond the critical point of revision to its present form I owe to the generous counsel of Professor Trent. Over the manuscript Professor Krapp and Professor Lawrence disputed with me the larger medieval tendencies. Professor Ayres and Professor Gildersleeve made the proofs occasion for futher constructive criticism. The grateful pleasure of recording these obligations is enhanced by the sense of friendly fellowship in the attempt to win more readers for our earlier literature.

C. S. B.

Barnard College, May, 1914.

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ENGLISH MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

ENGLISH MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

EPIC

The medieval literature of Europe may be very largely comprised in the single word *story*. Manifold as the interests of the middle age were undoubtedly, their literary art expressed itself mainly in narrative. Drama was in abeyance. The classical stage was empty; and even the manuscripts of the classical masterpieces were so far forgotten that the simple dramatization of the middle age was a fresh beginning. Lyric, or personal, poetry was less common than in either classical or modern times. The typical poetry of the middle age is narrative; and so is much of its prose, whether vernacular or Latin. History was usually conceived and composed as story. Even preaching made far more use than has been common since of illustrative anecdote and narrative method. Most of the great legendary stories of European literature are medieval: Siegfried, the dragon-slayer; Tristram and Iseult, the fated lovers; Roland, gallant unto death; Arthur and his Round Table; Percival, pure to behold the Grail. Heroes of ancient Troy, reappearing in medieval guise, performed new feats; and Alexander the Great passed from history into romance. As Vergil in the *Æneid* had shaped to the glory of Roman nationality old legends of the founding of Rome, so medieval story-tellers aspired to glorify the new nationalities growing up in the territory of the fallen Roman Empire. Charle-

magne, Frankish king of a new Rome, was celebrated with his paladins in stories of patriotic pride and national aspiration. Meantime the Germanic heroes of elder days had been sung in Germanic epics. Like the epics of Greece, these preserve an elder mythology; for the Germanic tales of the Nibelungs and Völsungs are quite as near as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to folklore, hero-worship, and nature-worship. They show how largely the strong new peoples had repeated the race experiences of the elder peoples. Many even of the later medieval stories are in much the same sense legendary; they are full of folklore, childlike wonder, and a certain youthful zest for adventure. The Celtic stories of Arthur grew into a great cycle as they spread over Britain and France into Italy and Spain. These Germanic and these Celtic stories, different enough in some ways, are alike in springing from hero-legends, and show alike how largely medieval literature is a literature of stories.

When we analyze medieval stories for their literary habit and character, we find a certain broad difference between those of the earlier and those of the later middle age. New habits of story-telling emerge into distinctness in the twelfth century. Though the history of literature is continuous, the old shading into the new, gradual changes are pushed on by fresh impulses and stronger talents into new habits and new literary forms. Thus the general characteristics of earlier medieval literature may be summed up in the word *epic;* the general characterictics of later medieval literature, in the word *romance,* and the imaginary line between them may be drawn about 1100. Not only is there no definite chronological separation, but even the approximate date varies from nation to nation. The Norse, for instance, in the seclusion of Iceland kept an epic literary habit in their sagas long after the habit of other peoples had

turned to romance. Nevertheless, when we take a broad view of medieval European literature as a whole, we see a clear difference between the earlier habits of story-telling and the later; and this broad difference is well summed up for the earlier period in the word *epic*, for the later in the word *romance*.

What is epic? The word suggests the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the *Æneid*, the *Paradise Lost;* to students of wider reading it suggests also the *Song of Roland*, the *Beowulf*, the *Nibelungenlied*. But at once appears a difference between the *Iliad* and the *Æneid*, and a still greater difference between the *Beowulf* and the *Paradise Lost*. On the one hand, we have an unknown poet making a more or less continuous story out of evidently older hero-stories which existed, perhaps still exist, separately, and which he has been more careful to follow than to improve; on the other hand, we have a very well-known poet, using old stories indeed, but shaping them according to his own ideas into a well-rounded artistic whole. In the one we feel more of the whole people from whose hero legends the stories sprang; in the other we feel more of the individual poet. The one may be called early, or popular epic; the other, artistic epic. Each kind has its own literary values, and the word epic is applied as properly to the one as to the other; but our historical purpose is concerned only with the former. For the history of literature early epic is full of significance. It may reflect race habits which later generations inherit; it certainly keeps the simpler, primary literary habits which outlive changes of literary fashion because of their appeal to fundamental human interests. In studying early epic we go back to the well-springs of literature.

1. BEOWULF

(*a*) EPIC HEROES

Our Old English *Waldere* keeps in two epic fragments of about thirty lines each an older form of the common Germanic hero-song of Walter and Hiltigund. The first fragment gives Hiltigund's heartening of her lover when, spent already with battle, he is attacked once more. The second preserves the answering challenges of Gunther and Walter as each boasts of his sword. Fragments as they are, they show the spirit of the hero-songs that lie behind epic.

Our Old English *Beowulf* is a fairly consecutive epic of some three thousand lines. "We have heard," it begins significantly, "the glory of the Spear-Danes' folk-kings in days of yore." The literature of every great race begins thus with the glory of the folk-kings; and the *Beowulf* takes us back of English history, back of England itself, to lands where the English folk was bred from Germanic stock. Its prelude is an echo of yet older tradition, the burial of Scyld, founder of the Danish house, in the great deep.

> Then departed Scyld at his appointed hour,
> glorious to go unto God's keeping.
> Together they bore him to breaking surges,
> bosom companions, as he bade himself
> while he wielded words, warden of Scyldings,
> loved land-ruler, long their master.
> At the roadstead bode his ringèd bow,
> icy, eager, atheling's ship.
> They laid him there, beloved chieftain,
> bringer of booty, on the breast of the ship,
> mighty by the mast. There were many treasures
> from long voyages laden beside him.
> Ne'er heard I that comelier keel provided

hacking weapons and harness warlike,
brands and byrnies. On his bosom lay
store unstinted that must start with him
on the flood's realm to float outward.
Nowise did they leave him less riches,
tribal treasures, than those gave him
who at his first hour forth sent him
alone over ocean, only a baby.
Yet more, they set him a standard golden
above his body, let the brine take him,
had him to high sea. There was heavy spirit,
mourning their mood. No man is able,
hero under heaven, hall-counsellor,
to say in sooth who received that burden.

Beowulf, 26–52.[1]

[1] In the translations on pages 6–11 and 46–53 first consideration has been given to the verse. Though this cannot be reproduced in modern English, it can, I hope, be echoed by translating the old staves, so far as may be, measure for measure, with the alliteration that binds them into verses, and by keeping intact, even at the risk of strangeness, the original sentence-structure. The first twelve lines of the passage translated above run in the original:

Him ða Scyld ȝewat to ȝescæphwile
felahror feran on frean wære;
hi hyne þa ætbæron to brimes faroðe,
swæse ȝesiþas, swa he selfa bæd,
þenden wordum weold wine Scyldinȝa,
leof landfruma lanȝe ahte.
Pær æt hyðe stod hrinȝedstefna
isiȝ and utfus, æþelinȝes fær:
aledon þa leofne Þeoden,
beaȝa bryttan on bearm scipes,
mærne be mæste. Pær wæs madma fela
of feorweȝum, frætwa ȝelæded.

(*Wülcker's revised text*)

As Scyld was a seafarer in death, so he may have been in life. So at least are his epic descendants; and so were the preservers of his story, those Anglo-Saxons who beached their prows on Roman Britain and made it England. With them they brought their Germanic hero-songs; and in England some of these were made before the ninth century into the *Beowulf*. Hrothgar's famous hall Heorot, it tells, was nightly devastated by a monster from the fens, one Grendel. Beowulf, a thane of the chieftain Hygelac, brought his band over sea, killed Grendel in single combat, and afterwards despatched Grendel's avenging mother. Returning home laden with gifts, he became a great chieftain in his own land, and finally died, at a ripe age, from a fight with a third monster. The story is like other epic tales of other lands. What does it tell of Germanic hero-songs and of their Germanic heroes? "Who are ye, hauberk-wearers, guarded with armor, who thus guide your ship over ocean streets?" (237–239) This challenge of Hrothgar's coast-warden to Beowulf and his men as they set foot on the strand frames for us a wider question. What manner of men deserved the praises of a Germanic people in song? The poem answers with descriptions so vivid that we can see again their weapons and their way of life.

> Straightway they went. The warship waited still;
> bode near the beach the broad-stretched bark,
> safe at anchor. Shone the boar-images
> over their cheek-guards, chiseled in gold;
> fair and fire-hard, fended them from foes.
> Warlike went they; warriors, they hasted,
> kept their company till they might catch glimpses
> of the royal roof-tree all rich with gilding.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Shone with stones the street leading them,

good men together. Glittered their mail;
hard, hand-woven hammered rings
sang in the steel as they strode to Heorot.
(301–323)

After formal announcement Beowulf speaks for himself with straightforward epic brag: "Thou Hrothgar, hail! I am Hygelac's friend and follower. I have won many praises in battle from boyhood. . . There (in my own land) five I bound, caught the kin of giants, and killed in the water nickers by night. . . I have also remembered that (your) monster (Grendel) in his recklessness cares not for weapons. I therefore scorn . . . to bear sword or broad shield, yellow-rimmed, to the fight; but with my grip I will grapple with the fiend and fight for life, foe with foe" (407–440). Every hero of early epic says: "Each of us all must abide the end of earthly life. Win he who may fame ere he fall" (1386). And Ulysses might have said as naturally as Beowulf: "Far countries are seemliest sought by a man sure of himself" (1838). But "win he who may fame ere he fall" meant in Germanic thought that since every one's death-day was foredoomed, and could be neither hastened nor retarded, a man's part was to fear nothing. The goddess of fate would take him neither sooner nor later. "Ever goes Wyrd as she must." Therefore, said the Germanic hero, I will never shun death, but fill my lifetime with manful deeds in the face of danger. Otherwise he neither hoped nor wished for long life. The joy of old age was that of Beowulf before his last fight: "Many are the battles I abode in my youth, hours of fighting; I have all in mind" (2426).

The epic hero was always, of course, a strong man, a fighter with his own two hands; but with his "might" he had "mood," and, besides courage, his people wished in

him skill and foresight. His rashness was not recklessness. A shrewd man of his time, he was glad both of the fight itself and of its gains. He fought generously, without base greed, but then afterwards he rejoiced in winning both the victory and the treasure. Quite simply Beowulf, after despatching Grendel, "trod the turf, of his treasure proud, glad of his gettings" (1880). Though fighting was good sport for itself, and the greater the danger the greater the glory, still the epic hero fought also for other gain. He sought something more reasonable than adventure for its own sake. He liked also to carry off booty or to win rewards.

So the epic lord is "the defence of heroes." Giving shelter in his hall, and good cheer, he gives also good gifts. His virtues are hospitality and liberality. See Hrothgar in his hall after Beowulf's victory over the monster Grendel: —

> Then was time and hour
> that to hall should go Healfdene's son;
> himself the king would sit at meat.
> Never heard I that a greater host of people
> around their prize-giver proudly gathered.
> Bent them to benches blithe followers,
> fain of the feasting. Fairly uplifted
> beakers of beer their brothers mighty,
> drank hail to them deep in the hall,
> Hrothgar and Hrothulf. Heorot within was
> filled with friends. Any foulness then
> the Scylding people scorned to perpetrate.
> Then the son of Healfdene handed to Beowulf
> a golden standard, guerdon of his victory,
> hand-wrought hilted banner, helm and byrnie.
> From the hoard a huge sword beheld full many
> before him borne at bidding. Beowulf drank
> a flagon before them. Never with these fee-gifts
> among warriors need he wince for shame.

Never found I friendlier four treasures,
garnished with gold, given by heroes
on the ale-bench over to others.
A wreath around the roof of the helmet,
wound with wires, its ward held outward;
so that filéd weapon might find it doughty,
shock-hard sword, when the shield-bearer
before foes must fare to battle.
Had then the earl's hope eight horses,
bridled with gold, brought to hall
within the barriers. On one was set
a saddle sewn with gems, splendid with trappings.
It was fighting-seat fit for the king,
when the sport of the sword the son of Healfdene
longed to enjoy. Never lagged at the onset
his far-famed force when fell the chosen.
And then to Beowulf both the twain
the lord of the Ingwines delivered in full,
horses and harness; bade him hold them well.
So, manlike, the mighty chieftain,
hoard-ward, heroes' hardships well repaid
with steeds and store, so that still he is praised
by whoever will say the sooth aright.

Beowulf, 1008–1049.

After the song is sung, Wealhtheow, the queen, bears a cup to her lord, and then to Beowulf:

A cup was borne to him, and friendly greeting offered, and twisted gold graciously presented him: two armlets, rings, and armor, and the goodliest of collars I have ever heard of upon earth. Never heard I of a fairer among the treasured jewels of heroes beneath the sky, ne'er since Hama bore away to the bright city the collar of the Brisings, the fair gem and its casket; he fled the cunning snares of Eormanric, and chose everlasting gain. This ring had Hygelac, grandson of Swerting, on his last raid, when 'neath his banner, he

defended his treasure and guarded the plunder of battle. Wyrd took him away, when he, foolhardy, suffered woe in feud with the Frisians; for that mighty chieftain bore the jewel with its precious stones over the arching sea; and he fell beneath his shield. Then the body of the king came into the possession of the Franks, his breast-mail, and the jewel, too; meaner warriors stripped the body after the slaughter of battle; the corpses of the Geats were strewed upon the field.

The hall resounded. Wealhtheow spoke before the host and said: "Receive with joy this collar, dear Beowulf, beloved youth, and use this armour, — treasures of our people, — and prosper well."

Beowulf, 1192–1218.[1]

These gifts are not mere hire. The value of the saddle, the value of the collar, is not merely its use, nor even its weight of gold, but its beauty and its history. So have epic heroes ever loved to hold and to hand down, or to bestow as dearest gifts, heirlooms and trophies. As the history of the shield of Achilles or the staff of Agamemnon was sung by the Greeks, so the sword of Waldere or this collar of the Brisings by the Anglo-Saxons, and Wiglaf's "old giant sword that Onela gave him" (2616). And when Beowulf himself came to die: "The great-hearted king took from his neck the ring of gold; gave to his thane, the youthful warrior, his helmet gold-adorned, his ring and his byrnie; bade him enjoy them well" (2809–2812). So frankly do the old songs tell us how the thane stood by his lord, the lord by his thane. This simple, natural relation of the time was not mercenary; for it was not on either side calculating. Gratitude expressed itself, on the one hand in rewards, on the other hand in loyalty. "So ought a youth," says the pro-

[1] This prose translation and those following in this section are quoted from Prof. Chauncey Brewster Tinker's *Beowulf*, revised edition, New York, Newson & Co., 1910.

logue (20), "to win favor by giving gifts unto his father's friends, that afterwards willing companions may attend him in his age, and the people serve him in time of war."

Loyalty was the binding force of a simple, warlike people. As the basest vice was flinching from one's lord at need, so loyal support was the social virtue most extolled in song. "It was their wont to be ever ready for battle . . . at the moment when their chief had need of them. That was a good people" (1246). Among a people with whom friendship of man for man arose mainly in the fellowship of fighting or the hospitality of the hall, the prime virtue was loyalty. The thrill of the hero-song is in its telling how the folk stood together.

No less simply the song ennobles fighting without making it unreal. True, there is in all hero-songs that exaggeration which sprang from wondering praise and from boasting of one's own kin or tribe; and this tends in time to make of the hero a demigod. Beowulf, like Achilles, has more than the might of a man. The tale tells of his victory over a mythical monster. But he won by his hand-grip. So in general epic fighting sounds like real fighting; and the fighters appeal to us as men of flesh and blood. Though the epic gives glory without stint, it does not exalt its heroes to the clouds. It keeps their human reality by keeping their touch with actual material things, good tools, good craft, good meat and drink, and their simple individual traits of steadfastness, boasting, revenge, or sagacity. For the people in their songs made the hero all that they wished to be without making him unlike themselves. The heroes of epic poetry seem very really human beings. They not only strive mightily, but also eat and drink, laugh and cry, like their fellows. For the epic hero is the representative of his people. As the singer voiced the feelings of the crowd, so the hero of whom he sang was

some champion, like themselves, who had fought and won for them. They gloried in him as their own.

His human nature is the plainer, too, because that early time set up little formality to check its expression. Life being simpler than our modern ways, song was simpler. One of the marks of epic poetry is its frank directness. Much of its charm is the freshness of youth. The *Beowulf* stirs us today because it is bold and simple. It shows us our race in its boyhood.

This clear and faithful picture of Germanic life, though it has been retouched by Christianity, shows, too, how these oldest English looked out upon the world around them. The sound of the sea, which echoes through all English poetry, is heard again and again in our earliest songs. The wealth of words for the sea is one of our oldest poetic traditions. But though there is close knowledge of the sea, admiration, and a fierce joy in daunting it, there is no other fondness. They loved the sea only as they loved a strong foe to fight with. It was dark, cold, forbidding. So, indeed, seems all their world outside of themselves, a place to fight in and to fight against. Merriment and all comfort were withindoors, in the hall; without, on field and sea, were trouble and struggle. Homer's Greeks, knowing a warmer sea and a kinder, brighter world, filled their songs with sunlight and the joy of the earth. The men of the north were bred to a gloomier outlook by their gloomier world. The hardships of nature so smote them that they were not at first alive to its beauty. Greeks, pulling up their boats, might feast and sleep upon the strand: —

So when they had rest from the task and had made ready the banquet, they feasted, nor was their heart aught stinted of the fair banquet. But when they had put away from them the desire of meat and drink, the young men crowned the bowls with wine, and

gave each man his portion after the drink-offering had been poured into the cups. So all day long worshipped they the god with music, singing the beautiful pæan, the sons of the Achaians making music to the Far-darter; and his heart was glad to hear. And when the sun went down and darkness came on them, they laid them to sleep beside the ship's hawsers.

Iliad, I, 467–476, Lang, Leaf and Myers's prose translation.

The Old English, finding no such hospitable shore, made straight for the hall. (See the quotation above, at page 8.) They could not have the Greek feeling of the kindness of all-nourishing Earth. Their Mother Nature was sterner.

(*b*) THE MAKING OF EPIC

The first voice of a people is song. In the history of every literature, prose comes after poetry. And this poetry is more really than in later times the song of the whole people. For not only is the people smaller and more closely knit, but the poetry is almost always their common praises of their common race-heroes. In the time of which the *Beowulf* tells, the gleeman or harper had a recognized position as a tribal poet. Hrothgar's gleeman is represented as singing songs of former heroes to awaken joy in hall along the mead-bench; and several such separate, older hero-songs are inserted in the narrative. One is the lay of King Finn.[1] "Hnaef of the

[1] A surviving fragment (51 lines) of the Finnsburg story is one of the most vigorous pieces of Old English epic, and is nearer, perhaps, in style than the *Beowulf* to the older oral hero-songs, as may be gathered from this rendering of its central incident:

> Then rose from rest, with ready courage,
> many gold-decked thanes, and girt them with swords.
> Then went to the door those warriors doughty,
> Sigeferth and Eawa, swords they drew;
> to the other entrance, Ordlaf and Guthlaf,
> whom Hengest himself all hastily followed.

Scyldings," it went, "the hero of the Half-Danes, was doomed to fall upon the Frisian slaughter field at the hands of the sons of Finn, what time the peril got hold of them." At the end of this inserted song by Hrothgar's bard, the tale of Beowulf goes on: "The lay was sung; the gleeman's tale was ended. Mirth rose high again; clear sounded the noise of revelry. The cup-bearers poured out wine from the wondrous vessels." The *Beowulf* contains several such separate and older hero-songs.

There is a close likeness between such passages in the *Beowulf* and certain passage of Greek epic; and the likeness is not merely in the social customs of old Greeks and old English; it extends to the way in which the older songs are brought into the epic story.

> Yet with Garulf pleaded Guthere then
> to draw no sword at the door of the hall
> nor risk at first rush his royal life
> where the rugged-in-war would wrest it from him.
> But he cried across all in no craven's voice,
> hardy hero: "Who holds the door?"
> "Sigeferth my name is, Secgas' prince,
> wide-heralded hero: heavy my trials,
> hard wars that I waged; there awaits thee now
> such as thyself would serve to me!"
> Then din by the door from death-blows sounded;
> in hands of heroes were hewn the shields,
> the bone-helms burst; and the burg-floor groaned,
> until in the grim fight Garulf fell
> first of the earls of earth-dwellers there,
> Guthlaf's son, and good men beside him.
> Sank still the slain: wide circled the raven
> sallow-brown, swarthy: the sword-light gleamed
> as if Finn's whole burg were blazing with fire.

(Lines 14–38 of Gummere's translation, *The Attack on Finnsburg*, in *The Oldest English Epic*, pages 161–2; New York, The Macmillan Company, copyright 1909.)

Then the henchman drew near, leading with him the beloved minstrel, whom the muse loved dearly, and she gave him both good and evil; of his sight she reft him, but granted him sweet song. Then Pontonous, the henchman, set for him a high chair inlaid with silver, in the midst of the guests, leaning it against the tall pillar, and he hung the loud lyre on a pin, close above his head, and showed him how to lay his hands on it. And close by him he placed a basket, and a fair table, and a goblet of wine by his side, to drink when his spirit bade him. So they stretched forth their hands upon the good cheer spread before them. But after they had put from them the desire of meat and drink, the muse stirred the minstrel to sing the songs of famous men, even that lay whereof the fame had then reached the wide heaven, namely, the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles, son of Peleus. . . .

Then Odysseus of many counsels spake to Demodocus, saying:

Demodocus, I praise thee far above all mortal men, whether it be the Muse, the daughter of Zeus, that taught thee, or even Apollo, for right duly dost thou chant the faring of the Achæans, even all that they wrought and suffered, and all their travail, as if, methinks, thou hadst been present, or heard the tale from another. Come now, change thy strain, and sing of the fashioning of the horse of wood, which Epeius made by the aid of Athene, even the guileful thing that goodly Odysseus led up into the citadel, when he had laden it with the men who wasted Ilios. If thou wilt indeed rehearse me this aright, so will I be thy witness among all men, how the god of his grace hath given thee the gift of wondrous song.

So spake he, and the minstrel, being stirred by the god, began and showed forth his minstrelsy. He took up the tale where it tells how the Argives of the one part set fire to their huts, and went aboard their decked ships and sailed away, while those others, the fellowship of renowned Odysseus, were now seated in the assembly-place of the Trojans, all hidden in the horse, for the Trojans themselves had dragged him to the citadel. . . . And he sang how the sons of the Achæans poured forth from the horse, and left the hollow lair, and sacked the burg. And he sang how and

where each man wasted the town, and of Odysseus, how he went like Ares to the house of Deiphobus with godlike Menelaus. It was there, he said, that Odysseus adventured the most grievous battle, and in the end prevailed, by grace of great-hearted Athene.

This was the song that the famous minstrel sang.

(*Odyssey* viii, 62–75 and 486–521, Butcher and Lang's prose translation.)

Of the Greek heroes thus sung by the Greek minstrel, one is present before him; and the song is partly impromptu. Two traits, that is, at once appear in the hero-songs that were developed or combined to make up epic poetry: first, they are traditional, and familiar to the whole company; second, they can be adapted to the new heroic deeds that give occasion for the feast, changed to suit the time. These traits are equally plain in the *Beowulf*. One of the ancient heroes of most Germanic peoples was Sigmund. The tale of his killing a dragon is sung by the English in the *Beowulf* as an appropriate part of the festivities after Beowulf's killing of Grendel. But mark how it is introduced.

At times one of the King's thanes, whose memory was full of songs, laden with vaunting rhymes, who knew old tales without number, invented a new story, closely bound up with fact. The man deftly narrated the adventure of Beowulf, and cunningly composed other skilful lays with interwoven words (867–874).

And to the lay of Sigmund, thus inserted, is added this contrast:

Beowulf . . . was more gracious to all the children of men and to his friends. Sorrow befell Heremod.

In a word, the old song was turned to fit the occasion by impromptu variations. The song of Sigmund is adapted to the praise of Beowulf. There can be little doubt that this was a common custom in real life, both Greek and English.

Epic poetry, then, keeps the spirit of earlier communal song. In this sense all early epic was song. It was sung before it was written; it was sung, in some cases, even after it was written; and doubtless in other cases it was never written at all. The minstrel in the hall of Hrothgar, like the minstrel Demodocus in the hall of Homer's Alcinous, had no manuscript. He chanted the songs that he had learned by ear and knew by heart. The legend of Homer as a blind singer, whatever may have been the facts about the unknown actual Homer, preserves an undoubted truth. The *Iliad* and the *Beowulf*, as each has behind it older songs, were both alike sung. Epic poetry keeps this trait of its source and inspiration, that it is essentially oral.

There is hardly any verse of this sort in the modern day of books except the ballads handed down orally from generation to generation, and perhaps the "cow-boy" songs of the American plains. Though ballads are not epic, they are like the materials of epic in this, that they were transmitted orally before, and even after, they were written. Thus the same ballad taken down in modern times from the lips of different people in different places appears often in many various forms. The story is the same; but the details have been freely adapted. (Chapter VII, § 1.) For whereas written composition is crystallized, oral composition is fluid. So an old hero-song like that of Sigmund above may be found still in several different forms. It was sung as Hrothgar's gleeman sang it; and in the singing it might be adapted to some like deed of might, as to the deed of Beowulf. In time, when it was included in some longer song, like the *Beowulf*, or expanded by itself, it tended to become fixed in that form. Thus the great national epics have preserved the national hero poetry in forms fixed by writing and single by their predominant merit.

The form in which each has come down to us is the work of a single poet. In that sense the *Iliad* was written by Homer. But, reading it in print as we read modern poems, we need always to remember that it was not made as modern poems are made. Epic poetry was written, not by a single poet sitting alone and apart to express himself, but by a single poet shaping in one long, continuous song some shorter, varying, unwritten, common song, or many such common songs, that he had heard from his people. Each epic had been sung in part or parts — the song of the Trojan horse, the song of Beowulf's fight with Grendel — before it was written as whole; each, even after it was written as a whole, was still sung. An epic poet was not so much a writer for himself as the spokesman of a people.

(*c*) Epic Manner and Verse

So much for the roots of epic, and its stem. In what manner did it branch out into fixed poetic form? The unknown English Homer who thus wrote the *Beowulf* had less shaping skill than the poet of the *Iliad*. Greek epic art was larger, fuller, more sustained. By comparison our English epic seems stinted and fragmentary. In parts it is bare; and it does not move steadily as a whole. The difference is felt at once in reading side by side the similar descriptions quoted on pages 17–18 above, or in comparing an outline of the story of Beowulf with an outline of the story of Achilles or Odysseus. In mere bulk the *Beowulf* is only about one fifth of the *Iliad;* and it lacks Homer's orderly development of episodes as parts of one large plan. For, whether in joining the parts or in planning the whole, our English poets of the epic time had less sense of poetic form. The *Beowulf* seems much less changed than the *Iliad* from the separate songs out of which it was made. The man that

composed it in writing had not Homer's fine shaping hand. In this it is but the more like other Germanic epics. They did not attain to Homer's art of the larger whole. To appreciate epic poetry in its range and fulness, Germanic peoples must go back to the Greeks.

But there is compensation in feeling ourselves, as we read the *Beowulf*, nearer to the unshaped songs of our race. As there is less of the art of the poet, so there is more of the voice of the people. And our English epic has its own noble art. The idea that it was barbarous and uncouth passed away so soon as we learned, after centuries of neglect, to read it aright. What this art is, deserves study in more detail, for the better enjoyment both of all epic art and also of all our subsequent English poetry. One forcible habit of expression English epic has in common with all other epic; it is very specific and concrete. The description of Beowulf's going up to Hrothgar's hall (page 8) is not in general, abstract terms, but in specific terms of our senses, in words that specify the details of light and sound and motion. The poet says, not "Their armour was bright," but "shone the boar images over their cheek-guards, fair, and fire-hard." He tells us specifically, "The street was stone-set. Glittered their mail; hard, hand-locked, the hammered rings sang in the steel." When Beowulf seizes Grendel, we know exactly how. "Uplong he stood, and gripped him fast. His fingers cracked." So Homer describes the blinding of Polyphemus by Odysseus:

> When that bar of olive wood was just about to catch fire in the flame, green though it was, and began to glow terribly . . . they thrust it into his eye, while I from my place aloft turned it about, as when a man bores a ship's beam with a drill while his fellows below spin it with a strap.
>
> (*Odyssey* ix, 378, Butcher and Lang's translation.)

Every epic poem shows this method of description. The image is made vivid and real by specific mention of concrete detail. We see the whole by seeing each detail sharply. Thus we feel with the poet; we sympathize; we are with him in the scene; for that heightening of expression which is natural in poetry, as it arises from feeling in the poet, so it arouses feeling in the hearers. And at its simplest it is largely the specific use of concrete detail. Compare with any passage of the *Beowulf* this typical selection from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:*

An. DCCCXXXVII. In this year the alderman Wulfheard fought at Southampton against the crews of thirty-three ships, and there made great slaughter, and gained the victory. And in the same year Wulfheard died. And in the same year the alderman Aethelhelm fought against a Danish army at Port with the Dorset men, and for a good while put the army to flight; but the Danes held possession of the battle place, and slew the alderman.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, translated by Benjamin Thorpe, Rolls Series, volume ii, page 55.

This is plain prose. The *Beowulf* is poetry first of all because its imagination and feeling kindle ours through such heightened description as makes words call up images.

Even in this common epic habit of description we discern differences of race. Where Greek poets and English give the details of light and shade, the gleam of sun on water or armor, the shadows of the hills, Celtic and Latin poets give also details of color.[1] The Welsh and Irish bards call a thing

[1] The colour of her house is like the colour of lime.
Within it are couches and green rushes;
Within it are silks and blue mantles;
Within it are red, gold, and crystal cups.
The corner stones of its sunny chamber

specifically red or blue or purple; the Greeks and English of the epic time seem to have had less sense of color, for their color-terms are comparatively vague and general. In another point of diction English epic differs from Greek. The *Beowulf* is often satisfied with mere mention of the specific details, or with such simple descriptive compounds as are called, from their Old Norse name, *kennings*, like *gannet's bath* for the sea; but the *Odyssey* carries out the image by comparisons like that of the shipwright in the quotation above. Homer is full of such similes, and many of them are carried out to great length. Similes are a regular poetic method with the Greeks and Latins. English epic has hardly anything of the sort. This one habit gives much of the greater poetic fulness of Greek epic and of the later imitations in Latin and Italian. The absence of it leaves English epic, no less strong indeed, but comparatively bare. For fulness is not a trait of English epic. Instead of supplying the hearer's imagination fully, English epic suggests by a few sharp, direct nouns and verbs. It is simpler, more reserved, more abrupt. It leaves more to the hearer.

Something of this reserve and abruptness appears also in the Old English habit of verse. The short lines are composed in two parts, called staves. What binds the two staves into one line is alliteration, that repetition of an initial letter which is seen in all the older Germanic poetry. When the alliteration is upon vowels, any vowel may alliter-

> Are all of silver and yellow gold;
> Its thatch in stripes of faultless order,
> Of wings of brown and crimson red.
> Two door-posts of green I see.
>
> Quoted by Morley (*English Writers*, I, 187–188), from O'Curry's translation of the *Book of Lismore*.

ate with any other vowel, *a* with *e*, *o* with *u*, etc.; but usually the alliteration is upon a single consonant. Thus, instead of a correspondence in sound at the ends of words, as in rime, Old English poetry had a correspondence at the beginnings, a kind of initial rime. Initial letters of stressed syllables in the first stave point to the same letter in a stressed initial syllable of the second stave. Beloved by later English poets as well as by earlier, alliteration is in the earliest poetry the main correspondence, the very pattern of the verse. Without rime, without rigid equality between staves or verses in the number of syllables, Old English verse had its correspondences mainly in the beginnings of important words.

Based rather upon the number of stresses than upon the number of syllables, the rhythm, though not irregular, is free. Any stave may begin either with a stress or with an unstressed syllable, with two unstressed syllables, or in rare cases even with three. The rhythm is felt to begin with the first stress. The presence or absence of preceding unstressed syllables being rather freely at the singer's choice, he had a chance for variety which has been used in the higher art of later and greater poets. Again, the sense, instead of concluding with the line, often runs on into the next line, concluding there with the first stave. Such run-on lines have been freely used in our later poetry to save the movement of the verse from monotony. Old English verse had none the less regular rhythms. The staves were combined in types clearly marked and strictly observed. But the regularity did not preclude variety in the number of unstressed syllables and in the adaptation of the sentence to the rhythm. In both these ways our earliest poets taught their successors that the rhythm of verse might satisfy the ear without being deprived of freedom.

(*d*) THE LANGUAGE

The language, the Old English or Anglo-Saxon which is our mother-tongue, sprang from Germanic stock. Of the Germanic tribes that broke into and over the decaying empire of Rome, the Franks conquered the Romanized Celts of Gaul; and the English — Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians — crossing the North Sea, conquered the Romanized Celts of Britain. The Franks gave up their Germanic tongue for the Latin of their victims, so that the language of Gaul, though afterwards called French (Frankish), remained essentially a Latin tongue. The English did no such thing. They conquered, not only the land of Britain, but the language. The British, with their Celtic and their Latin speech, were so pressed down or pressed back to the western and northern mountains that the land became England (*Englaland*, land of the Angles), and its language became English (*Englisc*). The language in the epic period, and for centuries afterward, though it borrowed a few Latin and a few Celtic words, remained essentially Germanic. That is why our mother-tongue, in spite of great changes later, is in its bones Germanic still.[1] Our English of today differs widely from the English of the *Beowulf* because English has always been a living, growing language. So long as languages grow, they change; but they keep the family likeness.

The structure, the sentence habit, of our epic is still crude. It is the habit of a people not yet brought far enough by civilization to express nice relations of thought. One statement is added to another, not by any careful subordination, but by merely putting the two side by side. Complex sentences are comparatively few. Compound sen-

[1] For the derivation of English see, e.g., Lounsbury, *The English Language*, or Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*.

tences are often so loose that it is hard to discern whether the poet thought of the members as separate statements or as one whole. Simple sentences are commonest of all — short, detached, single statements. *Hrothgar's hall was so famous that its light shone over many lands.* That is not our epic poet's way of putting it. He expressed that thought, not in one complex sentence, but in three simple sentences:

> That was foremost for folk of earth
> of houses under heaven. In it Hrothgar bode.
> Lightened its light over lands full many.
>
> *Beowulf*, 309–311.

The sentences of Homer are in much the same way simpler and looser than those of later Greek poets. But the syntax of English epic is even less developed than Homer's. The language is obviously poorer, for instance, in conjunctions and relatives; and the average sentence is shorter. This bespeaks, not only a different race, but also an inferior sense of form. It has its own strength of directness and swiftness; but it is sometimes rudely abrupt.

Such, then, is the *Beowulf*, our English epic. It is a hero-poem in our Germanic mother-tongue, made in England out of earlier Germanic hero-songs, made in the short, beating rhythms used by Germanic peoples to celebrate courage and heighten the mirth of the hall. Like all epic, it is simple, noble, and concrete; like the men that made it, it is a little rude and stinted, but straightforward and strong.

2. OLD ENGLISH CHRISTIAN POETRY

(*a*) THE PROGRESS OF CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION IN ENGLAND

The Old English folk that made and sang the *Beowulf* were heathen. They worshipped, not the white Christ, but

Thunder (*Thunor*), the mighty god of the hammer. Echoes of their Germanic mythology are still heard in our heathen names for the days of the week. Other modern nations call the first day of the week the Lord's day (*domenica* in Italian, *dimanche* in French); we call it the day of the Sun, Sunday (*Sunnandæg* in Old English, *Sunnudagr* in Old Norse). So our Monday is the day of the Moon (*Monandæg*). Tuesday is the day of the god *Tiw* (*Tiwesdæg* in Old English, *Tysdagr* in Old Norse). Wednesday (*Wodnesdæg*) is the day of Woden, the wise god, the Wuotan of the continental Germans, the Othinn of the Norse. Thursday is the day of Thor or Thunor; Friday (*Frigdæg*) of the fair goddess Frigg. Whether these names come to us from the Anglo-Saxons or from the later Norse invaders, they remind us equally that the oldest Germanic literature was heathen.

Why, then, do we find in Old English writings very few references to this ancient Germanic worship? The answer gives us a clue to the main progress of the Old English literature in England. In brief, it is this. Though the oldest literature was heathen and made by heathens, the written form in which it has come down to us is the work of Christians. For meantime the English folk were converted. And though the conversion outside of the centers was slow, heathendom lingering in many places and in many ways, the only writers, the only men that knew how to write, were not only Christians, but in most cases priests and members of religious orders. All learning and all education were for centuries in the hands of the Church. If a monk, as is probable, wrote down the *Beowulf*, he might, indeed, keep the old *Wyrd* (Fate) and other conceptions originally heathen, as susceptible of a Christian interpretation; but he would balk at distinct personifications, like Thunor and

Frigg, as false gods. Literature tends naturally to become Christian and religious when writing is known only by those attached to the Church, and authors are usually monks, when, in a word, civilization is wrapped up in Christianity.

Civilization is the progress of each people's law, learning, and life out of merely local and tribal habits toward such law, learning, and life as are approved by the world at large. It is an expansion very much like the mental growth of a boy who goes from a country village to a great university. He keeps his individuality; but he gradually modifies his ideas and habits by contact with the ideas and habits of a wider world. The change that thus comes about for a single man in four years we call culture. The similar change that comes about in a whole people through centuries of contact with more advanced peoples we call civilization. And again, just as culture comes to the individual by travel, by seeing the arts of foreign countries, so civilization comes to a whole people by commerce, by intercommunication with foreign peoples, by the crossing and recrossing of the boundaries of race. Modern civilization, then, is the process by which local habits are modified by universal habits.

For the Germanic tribes that conquered the Roman Empire the centre of civilization was Rome. They were not, indeed, so far uncivilized as they seemed to the Romans. They were much more than savages. Though some of them had little learning, they all had a considerable development of law and life. But their development was strictly limited for each tribe by its own boundaries. Intercommunication in our modern sense there was none. Except for raids of war, there was little travel; for there were few roads. Each people dwelt apart, following its own tribal life, isolated from the world. That there might be a distinguished national

development even in such isolation was shown by the Norse. Though their remote position in the Scandinavian peninsula and in Iceland kept them as a people longer than other Germanic tribes from contact with Rome, they developed a well-organized law and a great epic literature. But these same Norse people also show us how much larger civilization becomes so soon as it touches the life of the world outside of race. For those Norsemen who settled northern France and thus touched the life of Rome rapidly developed a much higher civilization. To their national energy they added the arts of the whole western world. In the art of war and in the arts of peace they prevailed over the narrower civilization of kindred peoples. We call them Normans. The difference between a Norseman and a Norman is in these aspects a difference of civilization.

In general the conquering Germanic tribes looked to Rome for light and leading. Brought suddenly into comparison with an international empire and an international language, their tribal organizations and their various tribal tongues seemed poor and meagre. As all roads, according to the proverb, led to Rome, so Rome became a general ideal of civilization. The effects of this that concern us directly are those on language and literature. The languages of the conquering Germanic peoples, Gothic, Norse, Frankish or Saxon, though they were much alike at bottom, had developed so differently in the isolation of each tribe as to have become practically different tongues. Moreover, they were tribal tongues rather than great national languages. For language develops with a nation; and these peoples had shown rather capacity for great national achievement than any realization as yet. German is the great language of a great nation; but Old High German and Old Saxon were the limited tribal tongues of limited tribal folk. English is the great language

of two great nations; but the Old English tongues were comparatively small and narrow. Now these peoples had broken in upon a state of affairs diametrically opposed; that is, upon a great, unified system of government, controlling many peoples from a single center, and upon a great, highly developed common language. For the peoples that conquered Rome, as long before for the peoples that Rome had conquered, Latin became the common language of learning.

And being the language of learning, it tended to become also the language of literature. Since the few who learned to read and write learned to read and write in Latin, it was natural that Latin writing should check the development of the native literature. This actually came to pass. The degree to which the native literature was checked depended much upon the degree of national feeling in each particular people. The Gothic literature and the Frankish have left few remains; the Norse and the English, though they changed their direction, had native force enough to survive and grow. Unless the feeling of nationality had developed far enough for expression in national, and not merely tribal, literature, it was natural that the great universal language should take and keep precedence over any vernacular tongue almost in proportion to the degree of civilization. No Germanic race escaped some degree of this influence; and so it came about that the literature of every European people during the earlier middle age was, in greater part or in less, written in Latin.

All this might have come slowly and indirectly by mere contact with Roman civilization. It was directly furthered and increased by the Church. Latin was the language, not only of civilization, but of Christianity. More than that, civilization came by Christianity. The two were inseparable.

The heathen tribes became nations by becoming Christians. Christian missionaries were everywhere the agents of civilization. All teachers, all scholars, practically all writers, were Christian priests. Our English word *clerk*, which until very modern times meant a scholar, is the Latin word *clericus*, or cleric. All clerks were clerics. And all the services and all the books of the western Church were in Latin. Translations there were, of gospels and homilies; but the universal language of religion was Latin.

The conversion of the Old English, then, affected their literature, not only as a change of religion, but as an advance in civilization, a coming into touch with the great world. It brought in the writing of Latin alongside the writing of the mother-tongue; and it put the writing of the mother-tongue into other hands and upon other subjects. The national feeling was too strong to let Latin supplant English as a literary language. The two were written side by side, often by the same man; but Old English epic found other heroes of song; and from hero-poetry English literature went on to other forms.

The missionaries sent by Pope Gregory from Rome found the English in 597 already christianized in part by the missionaries of the conquered British Celts. The British Church, indeed, with its headquarters in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, had long been a harbor of religion and learning during the fierce storms of heathen invasions. With a history that included St. Patrick, St. David, and St. Columba, it might well feel little need of help from Rome. But though Christian civilization had been brought in and spread by the British Church, it was part of the further progress of that civilization, part of the process by which both British and English were brought into touch with world currents of law and life, that the local Church should yield to direction from Rome. The

later dispute between British priests and Roman priests as to the proper date of Easter contained far more than theology; for the settlement in favor of the Roman practice brought the civilizing force of England into line with the civilizing force of the whole western world.

The story of progress is recorded in a book which, though it is in Latin and deals with Church history, has nevertheless by its breadth of interest and its sweetness and force of style a high place in the literature of England. This is Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Church History of the English People. As a faithful record of facts it has never lost its distinction; as a work of literature it shows again and again, by its lucid presentation and its vivid descriptions, how much our later prose in English had to learn from the literary skill of early English writers in Latin. Even in translation it illuminates this whole period. In 642 the rude old ways evidently lingered in the country. Bede says of certain villagers:

> While they gave themselves over-long to eating and drinking, with a great fire kindled in the midst, it happened, as the sparks flew up, that the roof, which was wattled and covered with thatch, was suddenly all in flames.
>
> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III, x.

Formal acceptance of the new faith did not prevent some reversions to heathendom. The three sons of Sabert, Christian King of the East Saxons, after his death:

> soon began openly to follow idolatry, which in his lifetime they seemed somewhat to have left off, and gave free license to their subjects to worship idols. And when they saw the bishop, at solemn Mass in church, give the Eucharist to the people, they would say to him, as the story goes, puffed up with barbarian folly: "Why

do you not offer the white bread to us also, as you used to give it to our father . . . and as you still cease not to give it to the people in church?" He replied: "If you will be washed at the font of salvation where your father was washed, you also may be partakers of that holy bread of which he partook; but if you despise the laver of life, you are no wise worthy to partake of the bread of life." But they said: "We will not approach that font, because we do not know that we have need of it, but nevertheless we will be fed with that bread." And when diligently and often they had been admonished by him that in no wise any one without the most holy cleansing might have the communion of the most holy sacrifice, moved at last to fury, they cried: "If you will not yield to us in so easy a thing as we ask, you shall not remain longer in our province." And they drove him forth, and bade him and his leave their kingdom.

II, v.

But the Church was patient and wise, not forcing where it had power, but winning and waiting. Since heathen temples and heathen religious festivals were fixed by the habit of generations as the centres of popular religious life, the Church, instead of destroying them, turned them to Christian use. Pope Gregory wrote to the Abbot Mellitus:

The temples of idols in that nation ought by no means be destroyed; but let the idols themselves which are in them be destroyed, holy water made and sprinkled in those temples, altars built, relics placed. For, if those temples are well built, it is plain that they ought to be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God; so that the nation itself, so long as it sees the same temples not destroyed, may put away error from its heart, and, knowing and adoring the true God, may the more familiarly resort to the places of its old wont.

I, xxxi.

So it came to pass that not only our names for the days of the week remained pagan, but even our name for the

greatest of Christian festivals, Easter, is the name of a heathen goddess.

Bede's account of the conversion of Edwin, King of Northumbria, reveals both the practical and the poetical temper of Englishmen toward the new faith:

(Edwin) in council with his wise men, inquired of each singly how this doctrine hitherto unheard-of, and the new worship of deity which was preached, seemed to him. Coifi, chief of his own (heathen) priests, straightway replied: "See thou, O King, what manner of thing this may be which now is preached to us. For I verily declare to thee from my own certain knowledge, that the religion which we have hitherto held has no virtue at all, nor any use. For no one of thy people has given himself more zealously than I to the worship of our gods; and yet there are many who receive from thee greater favors and greater honors, and who have better prospects in everything that is to be done or had. Now if the gods were worth anything, they would rather help me, since I have been at more pains to serve them. It remains, therefore, that if after examination thou shalt perceive those new things which now are preached to us to be better and stronger, we hasten to receive them without any delay." Another of the King's chief men, assenting to Coifi's argument and good sense, straightway added: "Thus, O King, seems to me the present life of man on earth in comparison with that time of which we have no certain knowledge. As thou sittest at meat with thy leaders and thanes in winter, with a fire kindled in the midst and the hall made warm, while everywhere without rage whirlwinds of wintry rain or snow, a sparrow coming in flits most swiftly through the house, in by one door and soon out by the other. While it is within, indeed, it is not touched by winter's storm; but nevertheless, its tiny space of calm run through in a moment, it slips away from thine eyes, forthwith from winter going back to winter. So this life of men for a little is seen; but of what may follow, or of what may have preceded, we are utterly ignorant. Therefore, if this new doctrine

has brought us aught more certain, it seems justly to claim our following." [1]

II, 13.

Thus Bede gives in this single scene a picture at once of the effect of Christianity upon English civilization and of its effect upon English literature. The old gods, as they ceased to avail for the conduct of life, ceased also to avail for the inspiration of poetry.

(*b*) THE ENGLISH MONASTERIES AS LITERARY CENTRES

The new law of life and the new inspiration of literature radiated from the monasteries. These were the local centres alike of Christianity and of civilization. A large part of the English people lived, after the old Germanic fashion, in small, scattered hamlets. Communication was slow, difficult, and dangerous. Therefore the missionaries must in many cases have lived perforce in groups, working out from a common centre. But besides, most of the missionaries, being monks, were bound by the rules of their order to live in communities or monasteries. Thus most of the religious

[1] Man's life is like a sparrow, mighty king.
That — while at banquet with your chiefs you sit
Housed near a blazing fire — is seen to flit
Safe from the wintry tempest. Fluttering.
Here did it enter; there, on hasty wing,
Flies out, and passes on from cold to cold;
But whence it came we know not, nor behold
Whither it goes. Even such, that transient thing,
The human soul; not utterly unknown
While in the body lodged, that warm abode;
But from what world she came, what woe or weal
On her departure waits, no tongue hath shown.
This mystery if the stranger can reveal,
His be a welcome cordially bestowed.

WORDSWORTH, *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, xvi

centres were monasteries. From them went forth preachers like St. Cuthbert; and to them came all who were minded to learn more. The religious orders, indeed, and their monasteries, existed primarily for the religious life of their own members. But in such circumstances they tended to become also centres of missionary effort, centers of education, and in some cases centres of literature. Outside of their walls there was little opportunity for teaching or learning, for reading or writing. They contained almost all the books in England, almost all the teachers, almost all the authors.

What, then, was a monastery; and how might its influence go forth upon literature? Without understanding this it is impossible to comprehend adequately the course of English literature through several centuries. A monastery is a community of men or women who have felt the vocation to be in a special sense religious, that is, to pursue a life more strictly in accord with the higher precepts of Christianity than is possible in the work-a-day world. A monk is one who withdraws himself from the pursuit of wealth and fame in order to pursue holiness. Such a person is called in a special sense "religious," or is said to be "in religion." In times such as Bede's, when the ordinary life of men was full of violence and bloodshed, it was natural that many finer spirits should seek "religion," that is, should seek escape from worldly turmoil into a life secluded and devoted to higher things. Thus arose great international societies uniting men by this common purpose and by strict rules for its attainment. These were the "religious orders." Their branches in different countries were sometimes directed by a general supervisor, and all were under the jurisdiction of the Roman pontiff; but each separate monastery, that is each community in a given place, was ruled by its own abbot or abbess, and each man or woman entering into "religion" took vows of strict

obedience to the rule of the order and to the direction of the superior. Though there were "lay brothers," many monks were priests; and, from the conditions already described, many priests were monks. Thus has arisen some confusion of the terms. The two, of course, are quite distinct. A monk need not be a priest, and a priest need not be a monk; but in fact, for several centuries, many of the English clergy were both. A priest who is thus a member of a religious order is said to belong to the "regular" clergy, from Latin *regula*, a rule. Most English monks were Benedictines; i.e., under the rule of St. Benedict.[1] But whatever the rule of the particular order, all agreed in a threefold vow of (1) poverty, that is the renunciation of all individual wealth, (2) of chastity, and (3) of obedience. A monastery, then, is primarily a community living the higher religious life under the rule of a religious order.

The monastery was strictly a community. There were no individual rights or privileges. All property was held in common. A rich man entering might give his goods over to the common fund. In any case he renounced his right of private property. The brethren or sisters wore a common dress or habit, ate in a common refectory, and joined in the common religious offices of prayer and praise in the chapel at stated hours. These seven "hours," indeed, are the framework of monastic life. They are kept with stated psalms and canticles chanted responsively, and with prayers and scripture lessons, and divide the day as follows:

matins, at midnight, or before daybreak;
prime (hora prima), at daybreak;
tierce (hora tertia), at nine;

[1] There are selections from the Benedictine rule in Cook and Tinker's *Select Translations from Old English Prose*, pages 278–286.

sext (hora sexta), at noon;
nones (hora nona), at three;
vespers (hora vespera), at six;
compline (completorium), at bed-time.

Besides, the monastic community came together daily to hear Mass before breakfast; and its members individually gave some time each day to meditation upon the Scriptures or the lives of the saints.

On this common framework of meditation, prayer, and praise was based the distribution of other duties among individuals. Some had charge of the daily alms to the neighboring poor, others of the care of the church, others of the library, others of the field and garden, and so on through a manifold group of industries. A life of regularity and industry for all and for each was thus based upon the maxim, *Ora et labora*, "Pray and work." Fresh air and sunlight were to be found also in the cloister, or open corridor, which usually ran about the monastery court or yard. Here the monks might read, or walk at recreation time, or in fair seasons write or teach. Active physical exercise was provided by the raising of daily food in field and garden; for in the simpler olden time this work might engage each monk some part of each day. Otherwise he would be set at that work for which he seemed fittest. He might teach, or copy manuscripts; he might be sent to preach to remoter hamlets; he might practice some manual craft; he might receive time to exercise his artistic talent in writing or painting.

Such was a monastery seen from within. Seen from without, it was first a little state within the state, preparing its own food and clothing, independent of outside intercourse, sufficient to itself. Secondly, it might be the church for all the country round. The choir, or place where the brethren sang their hours, was, indeed, separated by a rood-screen

from the nave, or place for the congregation; but at Mass on Sundays and holy days, the nave might be filled with a congregation from all the countryside; and at other times it was always open to individual worshippers. The comparatively large size of the choir in some old English churches is due to their having been originally "abbey" churches; i.e., churches attached to a monastery, and thus needing a choir large enough to contain the whole religious household. For many centuries these abbey churches were among the finest of England in architecture and decoration; for the monks, spending nothing upon their own persons, were lavish in adorning their church with carving of stone and wood, and with paintings on canvas and glass. Thus the abbey church, while it might be the religious centre of the district, might be at the same time the centre of art.

Thirdly, the monastery was a school, both for its own members in the days when reading and writing were rare accomplishments, and also, in later times, for outsiders. And finally it was, in a small way, a library and publishing house. Books were rare enough to be treasures. They were possessed only by kings and queens, great nobles, cathedrals, and monasteries. And the monasteries not only had books, but copied them. Remember that in the centuries before the printing-press every single copy of a book had to be written out by hand. In the monasteries this transcribing of books became a regular occupation, and often showed great skill and beauty of clear characters and of titles and capitals ornamented in gold and colors. The copyists were called scribes (Latin *scribere*, to write), and the book-room was called the *scriptorium*. Naturally, most of the books were religious. Indeed, it was no small part of the scribes' task to keep their monastery supplied with service-books and with music for chanting. Most of the books were written on thin, tough

sheets of parchment or vellum and heavily bound in leather, with leather thongs and metal clasps. Besides transcribing the books of other people, the monks often kept a chronicle,[1] or diary, of their monastery; and some few of them wrote books of their own.

From the point of view of the outside world, then, a monastery was a refuge, a church, a school, and a library. It was a refuge for the few that wished to withdraw themselves from the storm and stress of the times. It was the church, first of the religious community itself, and secondarily, when churches were few, of the surrounding district. It was often *the* church in the sense of being the most beautiful church, rivalled only by the cathedrals, or bishops' churches, of the larger towns. It was a school, first for its own members, since most men entering into "religion" needed instruction also in reading and writing, and secondarily for such few others as wished to learn and had no other means. And it was a library, or place of books and writing, the only place, outside of cathedrals and kings' courts, where books could be seen.

"Venerable" Bede (673–735), who was himself a monk in the monastery of Jarrow, has made all this very real for us in his *Church History of the English People* and his *Lives of the Abbots*, or heads of his monastery. Eloquently suggestive of the civilizing force of the monasteries is his life of the great pioneer abbot, Benedict Biscop:

> Within the space of a year after the founding of the monastery, Benedict, crossing the ocean to Gaul, sought, secured, and brought back with him masons to build him a stone church after the Roman manner of which he was always fond. . . . Moreover, as the work drew near to completion, he sent messengers to Gaul to bring over glass-makers, or rather glass-workers, hitherto unknown in Britain,

[1] See the extract from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* at page 22.

that they might set glass with lead frames in the windows of the church, the cloisters, and the refectory. This was done; they came. Nor did they merely fulfil the work demanded of them, but also made the English people thereby know and learn this sort of craft — a craft, indeed, not ill suited either for protecting a church lamp or for various applications to vessels. Besides, his pious care extended to the buying of everything proper for the service of the altar and the church, whether sacred vessels or vestments, because he could not obtain them at home.

And that he might further bestow upon his church such ornaments or furnishings (from Rome) as were not to be obtained even in Gaul, the untiring benefactor, making another journey, the fourth since his monastery had been established according to his rule, returned laden with more various store than before of spiritual merchandise. First, he brought a countless supply of books of every sort; secondly, he bore hither of the relics of Christ's blessed apostles and martyrs what was to be grace abounding to many churches of the English; thirdly, he established as a precedent in his monastery the order of singing, chanting, and serving in church according to the mode of the Roman rite. For Pope Agatho gave him at his request John, archchanter of the church of St. Peter the Apostle and Abbot of the monastery of St. Martin, to go to Britain as the Roman teacher of the English in his monastery. This John chanter on his arrival, not only imparted the traditions of the church to his pupils by word of mouth as he taught at Rome, but also left in writing not a few instructions which still keep his memory in the library of this monastery. . . . Fifth, he brought pictures of sacred figures to adorn the church of St. Peter the Apostle which he had built: namely, a figure of the blessed mother of God, Mary ever Virgin, and also of the twelve apostles . . . figures of the gospel history, to decorate the south wall of the nave; and figures of St. John's visions in the Revelation equally to adorn the north wall; so that all who entered the church, even those who could not read, wherever they looked might contemplate, though but in figure, the lovable countenances of Christ and his saints, or might harvest the grace of our Lord's

incarnation with more alert mind, or, having as it were before their eyes the judgment of the last examination, might the more strictly remember to examine themselves.

Vita Beatorum Abbatum.

Bede's own brief and modest postscript concerning himself shows how in his time religion and letters might be part of one life:

Born in the territory of this monastery (the twin monasteries of Jarrow and Wearmouth), I was given by my family for education to the most reverend abbot Benedict, and then to Ceolfrid. From then on, spending my whole time in the life of the same monastery, I gave all zeal to meditating on the scriptures; and, amid the observance of the monastic discipline and the daily duty of singing in church, I always found pleasure in learning, or teaching, or writing. . . . From the time when I received the priesthood up to my fifty-ninth year, I have undertaken to jot down briefly for my own use and that of my brethren, or to expand as to meaning and interpretation, the following books upon holy scripture from the works of the venerable fathers.

And he adds a list of thirty-seven volumes. Though most of these are strictly religious, three, from which quotations are made above, are histories or biographies; one is an essay in philosophy, one in grammar, and one in rhetoric; and Bede kept the fine tradition of the earlier medieval Church in several Latin hymns.

Bede's life was exceptional only in individual talent. For the organization of the English Church under its first archbishop, Theodore (669), had provided at once for religious and for secular education.

Since both (Theodore and Hadrian) were abundantly versed, as we have said, at once in sacred and in secular literature, streams of salutary knowledge daily flowed to water the hearts of a throng

of pupils; so that they gave their hearers, amid wealth of sacred letters, training also in the art of verse, and in ecclesiastical astronomy and arithmetic. The proof is that there are living even today pupils of theirs who know Latin and Greek as well as they know English.

Historia Ecclesiastica, IV, 2.

What Bede tells us here of the school of Canterbury was soon true in a larger sense of the school of York. York became an important centre of learning for the whole western world. From it Charlemagne called Alcuin, perhaps the greatest teacher of his time, to direct the education of France. These two cathedrals and the many monasteries,[1] throughout the Anglo-Saxon time and long after, were the centres of English learning and English literature. A literary class arose among the religious class; and literature was deeply tinged with religion.

(*c*) OLD ENGLISH RELIGIOUS EPIC

How did this change in authors and subjects, this change in the direction of English poetry, work out in detail? We find part of our answer in a beautiful legend reported by Bede, the story of Cædmon. We find the rest of the answer in the later poems themselves, and especially in those of Cynewulf. Of Cædmon Bede says:

In the monastery (Streaneshalh) of this abbess (Hild, or Hilda) was a certain brother especially distinguished by divine grace in that he was wont to make songs suited to religion and devotion. For when he had learned anything out of sacred literature by interpreters, he would in a little while set it forth in poetic phrase composed with the utmost sweetness and sympathy in his own tongue, that is in English. Often by his songs the minds of many were kindled to despise the world and desire the heavenly life.

[1] The school of Canterbury was very likely monastic also.

And though after him others too of our English nation used to try to compose religious poems, yet no one has been able to equal him. For he did not learn the art of singing from men, nor was he taught of man; he received the gift of song as one freely inspired from heaven. Therefore he could never make anything trivial or idle in his poems; only such things as pertain to religion suited his religious tongue.

Although fixed in the secular habit up to a rather advanced age, he had never learned any songs. Therefore when at a feast it was sometimes decreed for the sake of mirth that all must sing in turn, so soon as he saw the harp coming his way he used to rush from the midst of the feast and flee homeward. Once when he had done this and, after leaving the house of the feast, had gone out to the stable where he had charge of the horses that night, and had betimes gone to sleep there, in a dream one stood by him greeting him and calling him by name. "Cædmon," said the vision, "sing me something." "I cannot sing," replied he; "for but now I withdrew hither from the feast because I could not sing." Again spoke the vision with whom he was talking, "Yet to me you have somewhat to sing." "What," said he, "am I to sing?" "Sing," was the reply, "the beginning of created beings." Accepting this charge, straightway he began to sing to the praise of God the Creator verses which he had never heard, whose purport is this: "Now we are to praise the Author of the heavenly kingdom, the might of the Creator and his counsel, the deeds of the Father of glory; how he, since he is God eternal, became the author of all miracles. Omnipotent guardian of the human race, he created first heaven to be a roof-tree for the sons of men, and then earth." This is the sense, but not the same order of words as he sang in his sleep. For songs, though their composition be of the best, cannot be translated word by word out of one tongue into another without impairing their beauty and nobility.

Now when he awoke he remembered all that he had sung in his sleep, and soon added in the same manner other words of a song worthy to praise God. Coming in the morning to the steward, his superior, he showed what a gift he had received, and, now being

brought before the abbess, was bidden to show his dream and repeat his song in the presence of many learned men, that by the judgment of all might be proved what it was that he related, and whence. And it seemed to all that heavenly grace had been granted to him by God. They explained to him some passage of sacred story or doctrine, instructing him if he could to translate this into the rhythm of verse. He went away with the task and, returning in the morning, rendered it, as they bade, composed in admirable verse. Thereupon the abbess, embracing the grace of God in the man, instructed him to give up the secular habit and take upon him the monastic rule; and when he had been received into the monastery she joined him to the company of her brethren, and bade that he be taught the order of sacred story. And he, by rehearsing with himself everything that he could learn from hearing, and as it were chewing the cud like a clean beast, would turn it into sweetest song and by the charm of his echo make his teachers in turn his hearers.

For he sang of the creation of the world, the origin of the human race, and all the story of Genesis, of the exodus of Israel out of Egypt and their entering into the land of promise, of many other stories of Holy Scripture, of the incarnation of our Lord, his passion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, of the coming of the Holy Ghost and the doctrine of the apostles. Besides he made many songs of the terror of judgment to come, the horror of hell pains, and the delight of the kingdom of heaven, as well as many more of divine gifts and judgments, in all which his study was to draw men away from the love of evil and arouse them toward delight in the truth and quickness in good deeds.

Historia Ecclesiastica, IV, xxiv.

Certain Anglo-Saxon poems on these subjects, which have come down to us in manuscript, were long thought to be the very ones of which Bede speaks. This theory is no longer held by scholars; nor does it add to the significance of Bede's story. Whoever was the author of the extant *Genesis* and

Exodus, and whoever that Cædmon was of whom we know nothing beyond Bede's words, we see in this story much more than a biographical note on a single man. We see, first of all, that the old festal songs were still sung in hall. This descriptive touch of Bede's shows that even after their christianization our fathers cherished their hero-songs. Even the religious, indeed, must have thought the preservation of their national literature worthy of their pains; for the *Beowulf* as we have in it manuscript today was written down by a scribe in some monastery. It is plain, in the second place, that the monasteries might be nurseries of poetry. The abbess recognized the grace of God, not only in this man's piety, but in his poetry. And the religious community made provision for the only exercise of his talent which in his day and place was possible.

But the chief significance of the legend is the change in poets which came from the change in themes. The new poetic conceptions appear in the *Hymn of Cædmon:*

> Now let us worship the Ward of heaven's realm,
> might of our Master and his mind profound,
> works willed in glory, as He wonders of old,
> ageless Ruler, all established.
> Erst He shaped for earth's children
> heaven to roof them, holy Maker.
> Then middle-earth mankind's Ward,
> ageless Ruler, after fashioned,
> land for mortals, Lord almighty.[1]

No less high and strong is the opening of the *Genesis:*

> Very right is it that the Ruler of heaven,
> Head of hosts in glory, we hail with praises,

[1] Grein-Wülcker, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, II, 13, page 316.

love with our minds. He is Lord of all might,
Head of all His high creations,
God almighty. No beginning of old
ever was his, nor ending comes
of the Eternal; but he is ever mighty
over heaven's seats, for high throngs.
Soothfast, unstinting, swayed he the heavens.
They were established wide and stately
by God's power for guardians of souls,
children of glory. They had cheer and song
and their Creator, crowds of angels,
bright bliss; their blessing was endless.[1]

It must not be supposed, however, that the change of theme meant the sudden death of the older poetic impulses and methods. Not only were the old songs of war still heard in hall, but their poetic manner was partly carried over into the new songs of religion. The change was not a revolution. English poetry widened its scope and modified its tone; it became more widely human in appeal; but it kept its national character. This is very plain in the *Genesis*, *Exodus*, etc., which legend attributed to Cædmon. They are a sort of religious epic — religious in subject, but still epic in manner.

The Israelites at the Red Sea watch the pursuit of the Egyptians:

Straightway they saw from southward
the force of Pharaoh fare against them,
the spear-grove stir, soldiers glitter,
flags come forth, the folk march onward.[2]
Lances steadied; the line shifted.
Shone their shield-covers; shrilled their trumpets.

[1] Grein-Wülcker, II, 14, page 318.

[2] Following Brooke, I have transposed this line from its place in the manuscript after the two following.

A-wheel whooped the harrier ravens,
greedy of battle, ...
dewy-feathered, over dead warriors,
swart slain-choosers. Sang the wolves
evil evensong, eager for feeding;
desperate beasts, deadly boded
the folk-might's fall, fierce on the trail.
Howled these march-wardens at midnight.
Fled fated souls; the folk was hedged.

Exodus, 155–169.

Christians and monks as they were, the later Old English poets still felt a fight. Even the inward struggles of the saints they expressed by such specific, outward details as they might draw equally from epic, from the *Psalms*, and from their own time of war. The *Andreas*, a beautiful poetic version of the legend of St. Andrew, opens like the *Beowulf:*

Lo! they have told us of twelve heroes
honored from the ancient age under the stars,
lieges of the Lord. Never was less their might
in stout battle when the standards clattered.

The twelve apostles are "thanes of the Lord." Their honor is loyal steadfastness. Their victories of faith must be expressed by the real dint of arms. The heroes are new; but they are still heroes.

Keeping the spirit of its race traditions, later English poetry kept also the old force of descriptive realization. The sea resounds still with that fulness and distinctness of suggestion felt in the *Seafarer*. Storm, indeed, is nowhere more vivid than in the *Andreas:*

Then was troubled,
upheaved the whale-mere. The horn-fish played in it,
glided through ground swells; and the gray sea-mew

woe-wisher, wheeled. The weather-candle dimmed,
winds were waxing, waves were grinding,
stirred the streams and the stays were creaking,
wet with the welter. Water-horror stood,
mighty in battle.

Andreas, 369–376.

But there is a perceptible change in the verse. Sometimes looser, the staves are the more variously adapted to the poetic feeling. The slow, grave movement at the beginning of the passage above answers at once the outward foreboding of the storm and the inward foreboding of the travellers. Then the verse gathers swiftness with the rising of wind and wave, enumerating the signs of fear in parallel measures, up to an abrupt climax on the terror of the deep. It is hardly fanciful to see in such adaptation of detail and of verse a more conscious art of poetry.

The change is most obvious in the lengthening of the old epic line. In the *Genesis*, for instance, where the description of Satan in hell shows a conception of character far beyond the simple older motives of the *Beowulf*, the verse answers with a longer roll:

This is of sorrows most,
That Adam shall, he who of earth was shaped,
hold my steadfast stool in heaven,
happiness be his, and here we have this punishment,
hurt in this hell. Oh woe! had I of these my hands the sway,
and might a single time sally forth,
work a single winter-hour, then I with these warriors —
But here about me lie bands of iron;
rides the rope of the chains; I am realmless now.
Clutched me so close have clasps of hell;
fast have fettered. Here is fire about me,
nether and upper. I have never seen
fouler landscape. Flame never ceases,
hot over hell. . . . . .

. . So I know He all my thought sounded,
and was mindful eke, the Master of warriors,
that ill must issue, Adam's and mine own,
about heaven's kingdom, if only of my hands I had the sway.
But bear we now bane in hell, that is blackness and heat,
grim, unsounded. Us hath God himself
swept into these swart mists. So he may not assert as our sin
that against him we wrought a wrong in this country. Yet hath he
us bereft of light,
thrown into throes the greatest. Nor may we our threats accom-
plish,
wreak on him our wrong's vengeance that he hath bereft us of light.
Genesis, 364–394.

The rhythm is looser, indeed, but also larger. All the old epic force is there, the vivid concrete detail, the stir of action. Nothing is more characteristic of the old epic than Satan's sally from hell:

Launched himself upward,
hasted through hell-gates, had a heart undaunted,
wavered in the wind, woe-plotting mind,
swinged the fire in two by fiendish craft.
Genesis, 446–449.

And in addition the old epic line has been developed, crudely perhaps, in the direction of wider poetic capacity.

The singers that carried English song into new paths are to us mere names, sometimes not even names, for early poetry is largely anonymous. We know the poets, as all poets are best known, by their works. For the rest we have but guesses from the history of the time. We study early literature unhelped and unhindered by biography. Cynewulf, the chief Old English poet, signed his name to some of his poems. Other poems seem from their style to be

his;[1] and in general the religious poems associated with his name are distinguishable in emotion from the earlier religious poems associated with the name of Caedmon. The work of Cynewulf sums up the characteristic traits of Old English religious poetry at their best. It is religious in its spirit of prayer and praise as well as in that other sense of being monastic. His greatest poem, the *Christ*, is woven upon the seven "greater antiphons" of Advent, the special invocations said in church at vespers on seven days preceding Christmas; and all his poems have a noble reverence and a spiritual uplift. In thought he sometimes approaches Dante and Milton. In poetic form far inferior to them, he yet shows that the Old English art of verse had its heights. His descriptions are vivid with light and sound and movement. English in his loose planning of a whole poem, he is yet masterly in detail and especially in verse harmony. All these traits may be seen in a single passage of his *Christ*, part of the description of doomsday.

> Dins the deep creation, and direst well-fire
> walks before the Lord o'er the wide abyss;
> roars the raging flame; rent are the heavens;
> the flashing firmament falls into ruin.
> Then is turned the sun itself to darkness,
> to bloody hue, which so brightly shone
> at the world's dawn to warm its children.
> Moon, which has nightly for earth's multitudes
> beamed, itself now bends from its station;
> and stars besides forthwith scatter from heaven,

[1] Cynewulf wrote the *Christ*, the *Juliana*, the *Fates of the Apostles*, and the *Elene* (a poem on the recovery of the cross by Helena, mother of Constantine), possibly also the *Andreas*, the *Phœnix*, and the *Dream of the Rood*. Several other poems, especially the *Riddles*, the *Guthlac*, and the *Descent into Hell*, have been ascribed to him, but on less convincing evidence.

through blasts of might beaten by surges.
Lo! the Almighty with his many angels,
King of lords, to his council will come straightway,
throned in glory. Of his thanes are there besides
heroes in a host. Holy souls
move with their Master. Then man's Defence
with throes of awe throngs of nations
visits unveiled. Throughout the vast abyss
high the hail of heaven's trumpets rings,
and to seven quarters shrill the winds;
blow they breaking of breaches greatest,
wake and wither the world with their tempest;
fill they with fear all flesh of the earth.
Then the hurtling crash, hard, unmeasured,
grim and grievous, greatest din of sounds,
awful uproar, to all is manifest.

Christ, 930–955.

The tumult of fire and wind moves in clear contrast to the stately approach of the Lord to judgment. English poetry has advanced in the adaptation of sound to feeling.

Even in the tenth century the fervor of battle epic glows in two fine poems. The first, included in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 937, sings the victory of Athelstan and his brother Edmund over Constantine, King of the Scots, and his son-in-law Anlaf Sitricson (or Olaf Cuaran) in the battle of *Brunanburh*. The vivid epic description, imitated from the *Judith*, and the glad epic boasting are reflected in Tennyson's paraphrase.[1] More literally the lines run:

Foemen wavered,
host of Scots and hired shipmen;
fey were falling. The field slipped with their
streams of sweat from the sunrise on,

[1] Works, one-volume edition, New York, 1893, page 534.

from morning-tide, when the mighty torch was
gliding in glory, God's own candle bright.
(10–15)

The second tells the heroic death of Byrhtnoth in the battle of *Maldon*[1] (991) against the invading Danes under Olaf Tryggvason. The very spirit of England and of epic fills Byrhtnoth's answer to the demand of the invaders for tribute:

Hear thou, sea-goer, what this folk sayeth:
they will give you tribute of trusty weapons,
poisoned point and provèd sword,
this wealth of war-gear, of little worth to you!
Spokesman of sailors, say yet again,
tell thou to thy host a more hateful tale
that here stands an honest earl with his company,
who means to guard this goodly country —
Aethelred's earth, ever my chieftain —
place and people.
(45–54)

And both poems alike show the vigorous survival of the old epic manner.

3. THE END OF THE OLD ENGLISH PERIOD

(*a*) OLD ENGLISH PROSE

Old English prose is much more evidently a secondary literature. For the influence of Latin prose came before the English people had developed a strong prose of their own. The prose of any people is developed much later than its poetry. Its first use is for bare record of events,

[1] The translation by H. W. Lumsden in *Macmillan's Magazine*, 55, 371, is reprinted in Cook and Tinker's *Translations from Old English Poetry*, page 31.

without such pleasure in the writing as is necessary to give pleasure in the reading, and so to make literature. Language itself at this stage of a people's development is not ripe for those distinctions and combinations which are developed only with the development of a people's thought. So the earliest English prose is childlike in its bareness. The Latin prose brought in by the Church was so evidently superior as a means of expressing ideas that Englishmen, when they wrote prose, for the most part either translated from the Latin or wrote in Latin. The development of a native prose had to wait some centuries.

Still some stronger native spirits revealed the promise of this development by using the native prose with dignity and force. Chief among these was Alfred, the great King of the West Saxons (849–901). His prose translations, though they had the Latin to lean on, yet showed to Englishmen the capacity of their mother-tongue for a native prose. The development of native prose was also furthered directly by Alfred's care for the education of his people in their own tongue.

(*b*) The Foreign Invasions

The promise was fulfilled in the commentaries, homilies, and lives of the saints written by the abbot Ælfric (about 955–1020), whose style shows command of both exposition and narrative. But all the native literary development, in poetry and prose alike, was thrown back by two successive foreign invasions. The first of these, checked for a time by King Alfred, was invasion from Scandinavia. The harrying of the Norsemen and Danes, from raids of plunder terrifying the coast, grew into the Scandinavian conquest of all England. Knut, or Canute, became king of England in 1016. The effects of this conquest on the language and

on the literature were quite diverse. The Norsemen and Danes were Germanic peoples so nearly akin to the English that the two races merged without marked change of language. Certain words in our language today we know to have been derived from Norse or Danish; of certain others we cannot tell whether they come from Scandinavian or from Anglo-Saxon, the two are so nearly alike. On language, then, the effect was slight. But on literature it was as great as it was destructive. For these Scandinavians, though they were kindred Germanic folk, were still heathen. They had been touched but slightly by Christian civilization. What this meant for literature was written in the sack and ruin of the monasteries. Not only did fighting leave little time for writing, though it brought forth at least the hero-songs of *Brunanburh* and *Maldon;* but much of what had been written was burned by the invaders. In a few years the work of centuries was undone.

The effect of the first invasion on literature was to destroy; the effect of the second was to supplant. The Norsemen who invaded England also invaded northern France. But there, while they ruled the French, they adopted the French language, like the Franks before them. True, they modified it by their own Germanic speech; but, as they became christianized and civilized, they became French. Their northern force was turned into the channels of French literature. Norman French, though it was never standard French, has its place in French literature. A Norseman was a heathen of Germanic stock from Scandinavia; a Norman was a Christian of Germanic stock from France, half French by early intermarriage and wholly French in language and literature. And England, after being conquered by the Norsemen, was straightway conquered by the Normans. The Norman dukes brought in the French language; their

successors, as kings of both France and England, kept England in touch with all the French literature of the time. When the great Norman duke, William the Conqueror, won England at the battle of Hastings (1066), his herald Taillefer rode into battle singing a song of Roland, the epic hero of France. The Norman conquest of England put the language and literature of England temporarily under the language and literature of France.

Notes for further study. The best historical and critical study of Old English literature has not yet been focused in any single work for general readers. Henry Morley's survey, *English Writers* (volumes i and ii, London, 1887–1888) is amplified by translated extracts. Stopford Brooke's *History of Early English Literature* (New York, 1892; revised as *English Literature from the Beginning to the Norman Conquest*, New York, 1898) is the fullest independent general discussion. Others may be found in B. Ten Brink's *Early English Literature* (to Wiclif; translated by H. M. Kennedy, New York, 1883) and in the first volume of the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. Chapters i and ii of W. P. Ker's *Epic and Romance* (London, 1897) make a very suggestive comparison of Old English epic with the epic of other races; and such comparison is also furthered by W. W. Lawrence's *Medieval Stroy* (New York, 1911). Much of the best criticism is to be found in the introductions to editions of separate texts; e.g., A. S. Cook's on Cynewulf in the introduction to his edition of the *Christ*.

Though only mastery of the Old English language, of course, can define any one's notions of style, still study of literary conceptions and of the more general aspects of form can be carried somewhat further through translations. The two companion volumes of Cook and Tinker, *Select Translations from Old English Poetry* (Boston, 1902) and *Select Translations from Old English Prose* (Boston, 1908) have, concise historical and critical head-notes. By far the best single volume of translations is F. B. Gummere's *The Oldest English Epic* (New York, 1909), which contains *Beowulf*, *Finnsburg*, *Waldere*, *Deor*, *Widsith*, and the German *Hildebrand*, with notes and essays. See also Pancoast and Spaeth's *Early English Poems* (New York, 1911), Part I. James M. Garnett has translated into alliterative verse

Judith, *Elene*, *Brunanburh*, and *Maldon* (Boston, 1889); J. Lesslie Hall, *Judith*, *Phœnix*, *Andreas*, *Brunanburh*, and *Maldon* (New York, 1902). Translations of single authors or single works are fairly numerous. Among them the following deserve special note: —

AELFRIC, *Homilies*, by B. Thorpe, in his edition, London, 1844–6; *Lives of the Saints*, by W. W. Skeat, in his edition, London, 1881–1900 (Early English Text Society).

ALFRED — version of *St. Augustine's Soliloquies*, by H. L. Hargrove (N. Y., 1904; Yale Studies in English, xxii); version of *Gregory's Pastoral Care*, by H. Sweet (London 1871, in his edition for the Early English Text Society).

BEDE — Complete Works in the original Latin, with an English translation of the *Historical Works and Life*, by J. A. Giles (London, 1843–1844); *Historical Works*, by J. Stevenson (London, 1858); by C. Plummer (Oxford, Clarendon Press); *Ecclesiastical History of England*, by A. M. Sellar (London, 1907); in Everyman's Library, with an introduction by Vida D. Scudder and a bibliography; the Old English version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (text and translation), by T. Miller (London, 1890–1898, Early English Text Society).

BEOWULF — by J. R. C. Hall (prose, London, 1901); by C. B. Tinker (prose, N. Y., 1902, revised 1910); by C. G. Child (prose, Boston, with *Finnsburg*); by F. B. Gummere (see above). For earlier translations see *The Translations of Beowulf, a Critical Bibliography*, by C. B. Tinker (New York, 1903; Yale Studies in English, xvi).

CHRONICLE ("ANGLO-SAXON") — by James Ingram (1823, reprinted in Everyman's Library).

CYNEWULF (with some poems of uncertain ascription) — *Poems*, by C. W. Kennedy (prose, with introduction and bibliography, London and New York, 1910); *Andreas*, by R. K. Root (pentameter, New York, 1899; Yale Studies in English, vii); *Christ*, by I. Gollancz (in his edition, London, 1892), by C. H. Whitman (Boston, 1900); *Dream of the Rood* (list of the translations of this poem, which is not certainly Cynewulf's, in A. S. Cook's edition, Oxford, 1905, page viii); *Elene*, by L. H. Holt (prose, New York, 1904; Yale Studies in English, xxi), by Jane Menzies (Edinburgh and London, 1895). See above for poems translated in volumes of selections.

Among other translations of single anonymous works are: Tennyson's of *Brunanburh* (Works, one-volume edition, page 534); Henry

Morley's of *Brunanburh, Finnsburg, Judith, Widsith,* and *Seafarer* (English Writers, volume ii); Stopford Brooke's of *Seafarer* and *Wanderer* (History of Early English Literature); A. S. Cook's of *Judith* (Boston, 1888, in his edition, which also enumerates other translations).

Further references may be found in H. M. Ayres's *Bibliographical Sketch of Anglo-Saxon Literature,* New York, 1910 (Columbia University).

CHAPTER II

ROMANCE[1]

1. THE THREE IDEAL MOTIVES OF ROMANCE

WHAT most of us imply when we use the word *romance* is seen at its simplest in a Latin prose tale of the twelfth

[1] The best introduction to the medieval romances is still the *Morte d' Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory, which is accessible in several reprints. This version of the chief Arthurian stories, though composed late in the fifteenth century, is thoroughly medieval in spirit. Since it claims precedence also as our first great piece of prose, it should be read as it stands, not in any gratuitous paraphrase or garbled version. Modernization of its spelling does it good service; but changes in its composition belie it. Another familiar collection which still holds its place is Lady Charlotte Guest's *Mabinogion*, translated mainly from the Welsh of the *Red Book of Hergest*. Miss J. L. Weston has published, besides her special and critical studies, *The Chief Middle English Poems* (Boston, 1914), and *Romance, Vision and Satire* (noted below). The collection in *Everyman's Library* entitled *Aucassin and Nicolette and other Medieval Romances* includes several types, and so does Prof. Martha H. Shackford's *Legends and Satires* (Boston, 1914). Foot-notes to the following chapters supply references to translations of single French and Latin authors and to Middle English texts. These latter can be read with less study than is commonly assumed; and the object of these chapters is to invite such study, especially of Chaucer.

For inexperienced readers the only available special discussion of the literature of this period as a whole is W. H. Schofield's *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer* (New York and London, 1906). W. P. Ker's *Epic and Romance* (London, 1897), besides developing at the outset the contrast implied in its title, devotes Chapter V to the characteristics of the French romances. The larger significances are brought out also in W. W. Lawrence's *Medieval Story* (New

century. Though this tale has never before been translated into English, it is so like some tales familiar to childhood that we recognize it as typical; and indeed most of its incidents may be found in other medieval romances.[1]

Henno cum Dentibus, so called from the size of his teeth, found the fairest of maidens in a shady grove by the Norman coast at midday. She was sitting alone, clad in silken robes befitting a princess, and weeping piteously without sound of lament, so beautiful that even her tears became her. The youth caught fire at once. He marvelled to see so precious a treasure unguarded, as it were a star fallen from heaven bewailing contact with earth. He looked about, for he feared some ambush in the covert; but, finding none, he knelt to her and thus reverently addressed his supplication: "Sweetest and brightest ornament of the whole world, whether the benignity of a face that so awakens desire be of our mortal lot or whether some divinity, wreathed with these flowers, robed in this light, has vouchsafed herself to the sight of her worshippers on earth, I rejoice, and thou mayest well rejoice, that it befalls thee to alight in my power. Ah me! My thought bodes that I am foreordained to thy service (glory to thee!); that thou hast turned to the place of all places where thou are received with most desire." She replied so innocently and dovelike that it might have been an angel saying what would seduce any angel to her prayers: "Amia-

York, 1911, Columbia University Press). Further information may be found in Morley's *English Writers* (volume III), in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, and in Jusserand's *Literary History of the English People*. Anna Hunt Billings's *Guide to the English Metrical Romances dealing with English and Germanic Legends and with the Cycles of Charlemagne and of Arthur* (New York, 1901, Yale Studies in English, ix) is a valuable book of reference, especially for the comparison of versions. Location may be facilitated by Lewis Spence's *Dictionary of Medieval Romance and Romance Writers*, which includes Scandinavian and Irish tales.

[1] There is a close parallel in the thirteenth-century English verse romance *Richard Coer de Lyon*.

ble flower of youths, and desirable light of men, no plan of mine has brought me here, but chance has carried me against my will. The ship which bore me, with my father, to my marriage with the King of France was driven on this coast by the force of the storm; and when I had escaped with this single companion who is here beside you — and lo! her maid was there beside him — a fair wind succeeding to the tempest, the sailors made off with my father under full canvas. I know indeed, that when they miss me they will return hither with tears. Nevertheless, lest wolves devour me or wicked men attack, if thou wilt promise me my honor, as for thee and thine, I will abide with thee for the time; for it is more to my safety and health that I commend me to thee till the return of the ship." Henno, no dull listener to her prayers, grants forthwith whatever is asked, and brings back his treasure-trove with greatest glee of heart, urging as much joy as may be for them both. He brings home that noble pest and marries her, commits her to the care of his mother, and has by her most beautiful offspring.

The mother was assiduous at church, the daughter more assiduous; she gladdened the hearts of orphans and widows and all in need of bread, that she might the better keep within desired bounds all envy in the sight of men; except that she always shunned sprinkling of holy water and was careful to slip away from Mass before the consummation of the holy sacrifice, covering her absence by the crowd or by some household affairs. Henno's mother noticed this and, fearing everything in the anxiety of her just suspicion, applied herself with strictest care to discover why. She knew that the wife went into church on Sundays after the giving of holy water and came out before the consecration. That she might know the cause, she secretly made a little hole in the bedroom wall and lay in wait. Thereupon, at the first peep of dawn on Sunday, when Henno was gone out to church, she saw her go into her bath and from a most beautiful woman turn into a dragon, and, after a little, springing from the bath upon a new mantle which her maid had spread for her, and tearing it into shreds with her teeth, turn again into her proper shape, which when she had resumed, she served her servant forthwith at every point to the same

end. The mother told the son what she had seen. Summoning a priest, they seized them without warning and sprinkled them with holy water. With a sudden bound the demons passed through the roof and with a great shriek left their long-cherished abode. Nor marvel ye if God ascends corporeally, since He has granted this power to the worst of His creatures, who must even be dragged down against their will. Many children of this demon-woman are still alive.

Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, IV, ix.

In undeveloped form this tale has two of the motives which distinguish the later medieval literature from the earlier. Love and adventure appear in aspects unfamiliar to epic. Romance we know the tale to be at first sight; for, much as the word *romance* has extended its meaning since the days of Walter Map, it still suggests those aspects of love and adventure which in the twelfth century gave a new literary impulse.

(*a*) LOVE

By romantic love we generally mean passion and idealizing devotion; we mean wooing and worship. Much as our modern expression of these motives differs from medieval expression, the motives themselves got their literary vogue in the middle age. The story of Tristram and Iseult in the hands of Swinburne or Wagner has received modern direction and emphasis; but it remains romantic in the fundamental sense of wooing and worship. It is the great world story of fatal passion; and in the middle age that story was new. For in the presentation of love romance differs from epic. Love of woman has always, indeed, been a mainspring of literature, as of life. Some of the noblest love-stories of all time are epic. But in epic women appear oftenest as Andromache and Penelope, as honored wives and mothers. They take their place in heroic society and

in epic literature usually after marriage. Of wooing epic says much less than romance. Indeed, epic has echoes of that earlier time when wives were suddenly won with the sword. We can hardly conceive of Achilles or Beowulf as saying what Henno says to his fairy mistress, "Ah me! my thought bodes that I am foreordained to thy service!" Even if we could, we should feel incongruity once more in her reply, "Amiable flower of youth." Rather an epic woman might have laughed. For this sort of woman-worship is distinctly romantic.

Wooing and woman-worship in medieval romance are in great measure a literary code. Though the homage paid to women was doubtless enhanced through religion by the increasing honor paid to Mary, it was not only reflected, but promoted, by literature. Literary influences from Vergil's Dido and from the women of Ovid came to the French romancers of the twelfth century colored by the courtly poets of Provence. The love poetry of the troubadours elaborated wooing into ceremonious observance. This Provençal courtly love passed into general literary habit through France, and at the same time was brought into England directly. Eleanor of Poitou, who in 1149 married Prince Henry and thus later became Queen of England, had at her court the famous Provençal love-poet Bernard de Ventadour. The literary change brought about by these influences appears in the romantic convention exalting women as worthy of all regard and of long, unrepaid devotion. "Sweetest and brightest ornament of the whole world" is extravagant and, in Henno's case, somewhat absurdly elaborate, especially if it be read just after reading the simpler fashion of epic. To modern ears it is not, however, displeasing; for centuries of romance have confirmed in literature the romantic attitude toward women.

(*b*) ADVENTURE

As love receives in romance a new interpretation and a new emphasis, so adventure. Adventure, of course, is also a motive of epic; but in romance it is more extolled for itself, is less related to the character of the hero, and passes more readily into fairyland. Epic accepts and intensifies reality; romance protests against it. Because real life for most of us is humdrum, romance tells us that behind the closed door, or over the edge of the horizon, is mystery. Fancy, says romance, if on the strand beyond the next point should sit the fairest of damsels! In childhood we frankly play out these fancies and are not ashamed to love fairy-tales. And even when we are grown we keep a world of imagination, more or less hidden according to our temperaments, and more or less based on the real world of facts. Above the real world which we daily touch is an ideal world in which men are brave and generous without calculation, in which women are beautiful, in which, above all, something happens as we should like to see it happen, and turns out in just the right way. This ideal world is the world of fancy; and its expression in literature is romance.

Epic demands fewer fancies because it appeals more to our interest in the facts of life and in character. Though it has its dragons, too, and its zest for strange feats, its persons are usually both reasonable and distinctly realized. The persons of romance may be strange in action or shadowy in character. Epic dilates upon substantial meat and drink. In the *Beowulf*, as in the *Iliad*, the heroes rejoice in square meals; in the medieval romances we often read that errant knights, after a day of hard riding and fighting, "drank the wine and ate spices." But a hero of romance, though often he is not such a man as we meet in actual life,

is such a man as many of us wish to meet; and his adventures, far as they may be from what happens to us, are not so far removed from what we wish to happen. Modern romances give us persons and scenes less remote, indeed, than those of the twelfth century from what we conceive to be possible, but still remote from what we actually experience, still belonging less to our actual world than to the world of our dreams. For in every age romance is true not so much to the facts of that age as to its ideals and aspirations. The heroes of epic, more like the real men that we know, are more distinct one from another, Achilles from Ulysses, Beowulf from Hrothgar. The heroes of romance, somewhat indifferently endowed with all manly virtues, are all very much alike, Lancelot like Gawain, Gareth like Percival. A tale of one is often shifted to another. In medieval romance the character of the hero rarely determines the course of the story. Rather each hero in turn reflects a common romantic ideal of manhood.

Making light of the normal motives of men and the normal course of events, the hero of romance seeks adventure for its own sake. For this he turns aside at any time; and often his main object, if he have one, is not realm or wife or treasure, but that shadowy or fanciful achievement summed up in the word *quest*. Thus a typical scene of medieval romance presents an exciting situation without much regard to the reality of the persons involved or the motives of their actions. One day as Sir Gawain rode with Sir Ywain and Sir Marhaus, they found three damsels sitting by a fountain. The first was threescore, and had a garland of gold upon her white hair. The second was thirty, and wore a golden circlet. The third was fifteen, and wore a garland of flowers. "Why sit ye here?" cried the knights. "To show errant knights strange adventures," they replied.

Each one of you must choose one of us. And when ye have done so we will lead you unto three highways, and there each of you shall choose a way, and his damsel with him. And this day twelvemonth ye must meet here again, and God send you your lives; and thereto ye must plight your troth.

"This is well said," said Sir Marhaus. "Now shall each of us choose a damsel." "I shall tell you," said Sir Ywain, "I am the youngest and most weakest of you both; therefore I will have the eldest damsel; for she hath seen much and can best help me when I have need." "Now," said Sir Marhaus, "I will have the damsel of thirty winter age; for she falleth best to me." "Well," said Sir Gawain, "I thank you; for ye have left me the youngest and the fairest."

Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, IV, xix–xx (modernized).

These two literary interests, the epic and the romantic, have both remained permanent in literature down to our own day; for both spring from permanent impulses of human nature, the impulse to realize and the impulse to idealize. But one or the other is sure to predominate in a particular reader or a particular period. Those who prefer Scott to Thackeray, Stevenson to Kipling, are romantic. As with individuals, so with periods. Though both the epic interest and the romantic interest can be discovered in the literature of any period, one or the other is sure to have the upper hand, to be the fashion of the time. Down the history of any literature they rise and fall in turn. In the later middle age the literary fashion was romance. The epic interest was dimmed by the wide kindling of the romantic interest. Old epic stories were retold in the new romantic fashion; and hundreds of new stories appear as pure romance. The middle age is the first great period of romance. Even today when we think of romance, we are apt to think of knights in armor and ladies in long sleeves,

of castles and tournaments and hermitages, — in a word, of the middle age.

(*c*) Chivalry

And it was this middle age that gave to romance its third essential trait, chivalry.

Would he none forsake,
The red Knight nor the black,[1]
Nor none that would to him take
With shaft nor with shield.
He does as a noble Knight,
Well holds that he hight,[2]
Fast proves he his might;
Dares him none elde.[3]
Sixty shafts, I say,
Sir Percival broke that ilke[4] day;
And ever that rich lady lay
On wall and beheld.
Though the red Knight had sworn,
Out of his saddle is he borne.
And almost his life forlorn,
And lies in the field.[5]

This single stanza, though it belongs to a late version of the Percival story, follows closely the original form; and though it tells of Percival's father, it would apply equally to Percival himself or to Gawain, Lancelot, Tristram, or any

[1] The change in pronunciation has obscured the rime here and in other cases. [2] promised. [3] abide. [4] same.

[5] The stanza is the fourth of the romance of *Sir Perceval of Galles*, a fifteenth-century English version of one of the older romances (*The Thornton Romances*, edited for the Camden Society, London, 1844, by Halliwell Phillips ; edited by Campion and Holthausen, Heidelberg and New York, 1913). In the quotation above the spelling has been modernized. See page 135.

other hero of romance. In a word, it is typical. The love interest is plain:

> Ever that rich lady lay
> On wall and beheld.

The hero is fighting to win the praise of his lady. The interest of adventure is abundantly satisfied throughout the poem. The new trait here, which is not plain in the romance of Henno, is chivalry. The hero is a knight; the scene is a tournament or joust. The motive of a romance is not merely love of a woman, but what we still call romantic love or chivalrous devotion to a lady. The hero of a romance is typically a knight; and the adventures are usually single combats, whether, as here, in the "lists" where knights assemble to prove their prowess, or in the forests where they ride "errant." The heroes of romance belong to the upper class. They are all born and bred gentlemen. They associate only with gentlemen, despising "villains" and "churls." Their code is "*noblesse oblige*"; knightly duty is made by birth and rank. Whereas the combats of the *Beowulf* are stand-fights, the typical combats of romance are on horseback. The very word *chivalry* has the same root as *cavalry* and *cavalier*. A hero of romance is usually a knight.

But *knight* means something else. It is an English word, and meant originally, as it still means in German, a servant. Nor is this original meaning incompatible with the later. Rather it shows us chivalry in another aspect. Though a knight was on horseback, above mean men by birth and conduct, his ideal was service. This was the work of the Church for an age of war, the tempering of war by religion. For knighthood was not the mere natural result of rank; it was a service undertaken religiously and blessed by the

Church. A noble youth was bred to noble manners; but his breeding taught him to serve his elders and all ladies. And when, after serving as a squire in hall and on the field, he was deemed fit in age and strength, he received knighthood by a solemn rite. All night before the altar he kept vigil over his armor. In the morning, after Mass, he vowed to serve God and his lady, to protect all women, to succor the distressed. Only then was he smitten by some knight with the flat of the sword and heard the words, "I dub thee knight,"[1] which admitted him to an order whose professed ideal was service.

Romantic love is typically the service of a knight to his lady, romantic adventures happen usually as the knight rides to succor some damsel distressed. The knight's deeds for her and his conduct toward her and toward his fellows in the order of knighthood are regulated by courtesy. That word comes to us from the age of romance; it recurs constantly in all medieval romances; no word is more characteristic. High-bred, devoted to a high calling, the hero of romance must fulfill at every point of speech and manner the chivalrous ideal of conduct. The actual conduct of the actual medieval man may often have lapsed from this ideal; but romance does not try to present the actual. Medieval romance as a whole is tinged with chivalry and keeps the code of courtesy. Its informing spirit is generous devotion. Its love is chivalrous love; its adventures are chivalrous adventures; and its aim is to uphold a chivalrous ideal.

[1] The symbolism of the ceremonies of knighting is explained in the romance of *Sir Hugh of Tabarie* (translated in Mason's collection; see foot-note to page 94).

2. THE SPREAD OF ROMANCE

In England the change of literary habit was hastened by the Norman Conquest. For the Conquest meant more than the domination of English people by French people; it meant the eclipse of English language by French language and of English literature by French literature. The English court of the twelfth century was in literary interests French. Writing in England during that century and the following belongs primarily to the history of French literature. Prose, of course, was still written commonly in Latin; verse was now written commonly in French; and, whether prose or verse, the literature of the island conformed much more rapidly to those general, Continental habits which are seen at their earliest in French literature. What English literature must have turned to slowly, in the gradual inward progress of ideas, was precipitated by French intervention.

For romance became, more widely than epic, international. The medieval romances have so little distinction of nationality that it is possible to speak of medieval literature in general. They are typically such stories of chivalrous love and adventure as were current in the middle age throughout Europe. What we find in the French literature that sprang up in the twelfth century we find later in medieval German literature and Italian. France usually gives the earliest examples of what came soon to be written in every country where men wrote. Whether through the common vehicle of Latin or through translation, a story that gained success in one country was more than likely to travel to all others.

The *Beowulf* and the *Song of Roland* keep something of an elder communal appeal. There is no such appeal in the tale of Henno or the tale of Percival. The former was written at a French court in England; but it shows nothing

distinctively French or English. Similar stories may be found in the medieval literature of every European nation. The heroes of romance, Tristram, Lancelot, Ywain, quickly lost any original trait of race. Taken over from French tales into German, Italian, or Spanish, they appear in each language much the same. The scenes of their exploits are often in some vague, shadowy no-man's land. The names of places in the story often have no definite local meaning, and are freely changed and shifted by each new teller of the tale. True, by painful comparison of a dozen medieval forms of a story it is possible to guess its original locality; but the habit of romance is to blur rapidly in transmission the original associations of any story with any particular place. Tristram may have come from the Isle of Man, Arthur from Wales; but the significant trait of the Arthurian romances is not at all that they came from a particular place, but that they quickly lost all local identity in their general currency over Europe.

The romantic habit also widened the range of literary material. Such was the zest for adventures that there was an eager seizing on new ones. The two sources most used were, first, unwritten popular traditions of fairies, demons, and witches; and, second, oriental tales coming into western literature mainly through Greek versions. The first was most abundant among the Celtic peoples, and was first used by their Norman neighbors in France and England. Many of the romances popular throughout Europe may be traced back to the fairy folklore of the Celts. In this aspect also the tale of Henno is typical. The oriental source is clear in medieval versions of stories older than history. The Bible story of the temptation of Joseph by Potiphar's wife (Genesis xxxix) appears in medieval romances in various forms. The story of the werewolf, or man-wolf, which

has been retold a hundred times down to our own day,[1] though it seems in some cases to have been taken from local folk-lore, is found also in ancient oriental forms. *Barlaam et Josaphaz*, an Anglo-Norman collection of the thirteenth century, derives, through a Latin version, from a Greek christianization of legends originally oriental. The Crusades must have contributed to bring about the common use of oriental personages. Saracens they are called, or Paynims; and, in addition to the romances in which they are main figures, are many others in which they appear incidentally, side by side with Christian knights. Old as was the oriental source and even the Celtic, their tales were new to European literature.

This eager use of all available material for stories, whether it were old or new, native or foreign, discovered or rediscovered, shows a great stir of literary activity, and may be exhibited both by a modern parallel and by an actual medieval instance. A perfect modern illustration of the ways of romance is the work of Walter Scott. A born romancer, he first turned to account in verse the traditions of the people among whom he lived. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *The Lady of the Lake*, and his other verse-romances use history indeed, but use it with romantic coloring of fairy folk-lore, and with predominance of the romantic motives of chivalrous love and adventure. As he went on in prose to widen the field of his material, he turned, like the generations of romancers before him, to the mysterious East. He found romantic material and gorgeous romantic color in the Crusades.

[1] The latest version, perhaps, is the Mowgli stories in Mr. Kipling's *Jungle Book*. Two medieval French versions are *Bisclavret* and *Guillaume de Palerne*, the latter translated about the middle of the fourteenth century into English alliterative verse (*William of Palerne*, edited by W. W. Skeat, Early English Text Society, 1867).

He gave us, not only *Ivanhoe*, but also the *Talisman*. But to the medieval romancer much of this material was freshly new. Thus Walter Map's Latin book *De Nugis Curialium*,[1] besides the tale of Henno (page 60), has many other Celtic folk-tales of witch-wives, of ghosts that call the living to death, of men who, like Rip Van Winkle, stayed too long in fairy-land; and these tales he may have got, not from written records overlaid by the centuries, but fresh from the mouths of the Welsh peasantry about Hereford. History too he uses, but history that he heard from the actors or their immediate descendants and chose for its romantic possibilities. Whether he works a tale out or leaves it in mere outline — for much of his book consists of notes — he is always evidently on the lookout for romantic material. And this material he found, not only in folk-lore and traditional history, but also in old tales of the East. Keen for stories, he takes them from everywhere; he casts them now in this form, now in that, but always romantically. He is a type of the great romantic movement of the twelfth century. Walter Map in the twelfth century and Walter Scott in the nineteenth alike reveal the character of romance, its constant motives of love and adventure and its world-wide search for material.

The period of romance, then, as we see it best exemplified in French literature of the twelfth century, is the period of great world-stories. There is hardly one of these medieval stories which had any literary promise but was caught up and carried everywhere. And as they passed over the civilized world, so they have passed down through the centuries even to us. In every civilized country of the world today some one is reading somewhere, in some form old or new, the

[1] Gualteri Mapes *de Nugis Curialium*, edited by Thomas Wright, London, Camden Society, 1850.

immortal romances that were made for knights and ladies seven hundred years ago. Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is the direct descendant of a long and famous line. He got the tales mainly from an English prose version of the fifteenth century. That version was derived from French versions, which in turn were derived from — but the ultimate source is still in doubt, so far back reaches the pedigree of the stories of Arthur. Walter Map himself may have had a hand in shaping them. And behind him lie lost unwritten Celtic legends of his Welsh marches. Now all this is thoroughly characteristic of romance. Not one of the great romances has ever died; not one but has been changed again and again down the centuries to suit the sympathies of each writer's age. The *Idylls of the King* are conceived very differently from their twelfth-century French originals, very differently even from their fifteenth-century English ones, partly because romance lives by perpetual change.

At the grand opera in Berlin, Paris, and New York the well-to-do listen every year to Wagner's dramatic version of the romance of *Lohengrin*. Meantime the poor in Italy and in the Italian quarters of North and South America never tire of seeing the romances of Charlemagne represented on the little stage of the marionettes. The operator pulling his wires behind the scenes knows the tales by heart; and any of his audience with the will and the skill to read may find the book wherever Italian books are sold.[1] Nothing could exhibit more graphically that romance knows neither place nor time.

Who are the heroes that have thus conquered space and time, the world-heroes of romance? Not the heroes of Troy, who have suffered a sea change in the medieval Troy

[1] The current form is a prose collection entitled *I Paladini di Francia*.

books; nor Alexander,[1] conqueror of the East; but Charlemagne, emperor of the new Rome; and, above all, Arthur. Arthur is first of all, not only for us of English speech, but for other nations as well. With him the collective romances group Gawain the courteous, Percival the pure in heart, Lancelot the peerless knight, and even Tristram the lover. No other ladies are more widely known than Queen Guinevere, the white Elaine, Iseult, and the witch-wife Morgan le Fay. No other magician is so great as Merlin. Lovers of romance will recall twenty other heroes, King Horn, Guy of Warwick, Bevis of Hampton; but, when we say romance, we recall most readily the knights of the Table Round. For the development of the Arthur stories is typically romantic, both in springing from Celtic legend and in growing to a full cycle. This cycle was much enhanced in popularity by including the legend of the Grail. Each of these aspects, the Celtic origin, the cyclical development, the inclusion of the Grail stories, deserves separate attention.

(*a*) HISTORY AND LEGEND

In their legendary origin the Arthur stories had a certain advantage as romances over the stories of Charlemagne. Charlemagne, even in the romances, remains the real king of a real territory. Not only is the *Chanson de Roland*[2] essentially epic, but the later Charlemagne stories, romantically as they are rehandled, show some obligation to historical fact. Arthur, on the other hand, though there was indeed a real Celtic chieftain of that name, is almost from the

[1] The English *Kyng Alisaunder* is summarized in Morley's *English Writers*, volume III, page 289. See Caxton's preface to Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, quoted below, page 162.

[2] There is an English prose translation by Isabel Butler (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Riverside Literature Series, 157).

beginning legendary and soon becomes in literature the ideal king of a vague realm. *Matière de France*, to use the phrase of the time, seems to have offered less liberty, as it offered less love, than *matière de Bretagne*, matter concerning Britain or Brittany, the frontier of fairyland. At any rate, the romancer who embarked for fairyland felt no epic obligation to reality. "Many a marvel hath come to pass in Brittany." Its tales are all of love, adventure, enchantment; and these are the material of pure romance.

For this matter of Britain and Brittany, of which the Arthur stories formed a large part, was Celtic. It came from a people then and now but half known to its neighbors, a people early subjugated but never yielding at heart, a people nursing for a solace in defeat old, mysterious race traditions, a people of quick sensitiveness and quicker imagination. Shy and dreamy over the pathos of his race, the Celt has always kept nevertheless a certain impulsiveness and expansiveness. Brooding fondly over his past, he is yet quick to feel the joy of the present. No other race has felt more keenly the joy of music in song or verse and of bright colors. Color and music are a natural inheritance of the Celt. While his temperament gives his literature brightness, openness, and gaiety, his history has given it an undercurrent of pathos. It is like a smile with tears behind. Emotional in both his humorous gaiety and his pathos, the Celt was hardly understood by the reserved and serious Old English. He found at once much readier sympathy in the Normans. For the Normans had in their veins by intermarriage much Celtic blood. They were themselves part Celt. The Celtic strain, which is evident throughout French literature, is heard first in the Norman-Celtic stories of the middle age. And it is this Celtic strain which first made pure romance.

The harp, which is still the emblem of Celtic Ireland, is a

fit symbol of the Celtic influence on medieval literature. For the earliest Celtic compositions of this period seem to have been both story and song. They were called *lays* (French *lai*); and this name seems to have meant at first a lyric expressing the emotion of some sharp moment of the story and sung to the rote, or small Celtic harp. French poets, seizing on this new literary material and giving it finished literary form, called their whole stories *lais*. A lay was thus a short verse-romance. It differed from the later romances mainly in length, dealing with a single situation or adventure. The most famous lays that have come down to us are those of Marie de France, a Frenchwoman who lived and wrote in England. In general the lays were derived, directly or indirectly, from Celtic legends. They are the chivalrous French rendering of the folklore of the Celts.

Such use of Celtic stories by French writers was doubtless widespread. Though few French lays have survived, many others seem to underlie the longer romances, and some we know to have been so woven in. Walter Map's book contains much Celtic folklore which seems to have been gathered from oral traditions in Wales. Some of his tales reappear as parts of later romances; others exist only in his brief sketches. But there is evidence enough that French poets and prose-writers got both romantic material and romantic motives from the folk-lore of the Celts. And the Celts took back with interest what they had lent. Legends derived from oral Celtic tradition and put into French literary form were sometimes turned back into Celtic by Welsh bards. To disentangle such a criss-cross of versions requires the most expert scholarship, and is far from our present purpose. Enough that much of the material used in the French romances of the twelfth century was Celtic, that this material is at the

bottom of those romances which are purely romantic, and especially of the Arthur stories. These greatest of all romances in their earliest forms sprang from the fusing of wholly Celtic material in the minds of half-Celtic writers. Among the dreamers and in the land of dreams was born the most ideal of all romances.

(1) *Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniæ*

The earliest Arthur story of any length and consistency is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniæ*.[1] The title *historia* did not connote in the twelfth century that distinction between fact and legend which is now suggested by our word *history*. Not only was Geoffrey's *historia*, like others of its time, largely legendary; it was in effect largely a prose romance.

Oftentimes in turning over in mine own mind the many themes that might be the subject-matter of a book, my thoughts would fall upon the plan of writing a history of the Kings of Britain, and in my musings thereupon meseemed it a marvel that, beyond such mention as Gildas and Bede have made of them in their luminous tractate, nought could I find as concerning the kings that had

[1] *Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain*, translated by Sebastian Evans, LL.D., London, 1904 (Dent's Temple Classics and also Everyman's Library). There is an earlier translation, *The British History of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, in twelve books, translated from the Latin by A. Thompson, a new edition, revised and corrected by J. A. Giles, LL.D., London, 1842 (reprinted in *Six Old English Chronicles*, Bohn Library). See R. H. Fletcher, *Arthurian Material in the Chronicles* (Harvard Studies in Philology and Literature, vol. x, 1906); and W. Lewis Jones, *King Arthur in History and Legend*, (Cambridge, University Press, 1911). Dr. Evans conjectures 1139 as the date of Geoffrey's work in its first form; 1148 as the date of the form that has come down to us containing the prophecies of Merlin.

dwelt in Britain before the Incarnation of Christ, nor nought even as concerning Arthur and the many others that did succeed him after the Incarnation, albeit that their deeds be worthy of praise everlasting and be as pleasantly rehearsed from memory by word of mouth in the traditions of many peoples as though they had been written down. Now, whilst I was thus thinking upon such matters, Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, a man learned not only in the art of eloquence, but in the histories of foreign lands, offered me a certain most ancient book in the British language that did set forth the doings of them all in due succession and order from Brute, the first King of the Britons, onward to Cadwallader, the son of Cadwallo, all told in stories of exceeding beauty. At his request, therefore, . . . have I been at the pains to translate this volume into the Latin tongue.

Geoffrey of Monmouth, History of the Kings of Britain, dedicatory epistle.

The book of Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, has never been found. It never will be found, more than one critic has said; for Geoffrey has been suspected, from his own day down to ours, of inventing his source as well as much of his narrative. However that may be, he had pretty evidently Celtic legendary material "all told in stories"; and that material has been shaped, whether by a previous writer or by Geoffrey himself, into consistency and continuity.

Brute, or Brutus, great-grandson of Trojan Æneas, was guided by a response of Diana from Italy through France to Albion. Landing at Totnes, he called the island Britain and his people Britons. Of his three sons, Locrine inherited the middle part (Loegria); Albanact, Scotland; and Camber, Wales (Cambria). Slurring the historical conquest of the island by the Romans, Geoffrey tells how Britain was converted, how the wizard Merlin foretold its greatness, and how it was deceived and harried, but never quite conquered, by the Saxons. By Merlin's enchantment Igerne, wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, receiving in her lord's

stead King Uther Pendragon, became the mother of Arthur and, on the instant death of Gorlois, Uther's queen. Arthur, succeeding to the kingdom, defeated the Saxons and all his other enemies in the island, subdued Iceland, Gothland, and the Orkneys, set his brother-in-law Lot on the throne of Norway, married Guenevere, a noble Roman lady, and finally held at Caerleon a glorious coronation feast, to which came many princes his subjects and allies. Lucius, Emperor of Rome, demanding tribute, Arthur left his kingdom and his queen in charge of his nephew Mordred, and led a great host of allies to the Continent. He slew single-handed the giant of St. Michael's Mount, and defeated Lucius in a series of battles. As he was marching over the Alps to invade Rome, he heard that Mordred had seized both kingdom and queen for his own. He returned forthwith and defeated Mordred in desperate conflict, but being wounded to the death, he was borne to the isle of Avalon for healing, and gave up his crown to Constantine. Guenevere meantime retired to a nunnery. Thereafter the Saxons conquered, and the kingdom decayed.

For ten books of his twelve Geoffrey's narrative is fairly full. He dwells especially on the exploits of Arthur, and culminates with lively detail on the coronation and the war with Rome. At that point he suddenly lapses into summary. "Hereof will Geoffrey of Monmouth say nought." Perhaps his main idea was to make out of Celtic legends a consecutive heroic story for the composite people, English-French-Celtic, which in twelfth-century England was gaining a pride of common nationality. At any rate, he succeeded in establishing Arthur as our national hero of romance.

Here, moreover, is many another familiar name: Lear, Ferrex and Porrex, Cymbeline, revived in Elizabethan drama; and, of the Arthurian group, Merlin, Uther and Igraine, Lot, Cador, Howell, Mordred, Bedivere, Kay, and especially the gallant Gawain. Only there is no Lancelot and no Holy Grail. Arthur has the shield Priwen, "Caliburn, best of

swords, that was forged within the Isle of Avalon," and the lance Ron. Nor is there lack elsewhere of Celtic fairy marvels. But the fighting has more tactics and statagem than in the later romances. It reads as if Geoffrey had seen real war, or as if he had in mind those classical authors from whom he may have borrowed the idea of the speeches that he puts into the mouths of his characters on important occasions. The *Historia Regum Britanniæ* is not quite a romance in the sense fixed upon the word during the next century; but it is largely romantic, and it was a wondrous begetter of romances.

(*b*) CYCLES OF ROMANCE

In another sense Geoffrey's work is romantic. It shows the tendency of medieval writers to group separate stories into a larger composition about one central figure. Thus the Roland story was turned to fit into a series of romances grouped about Charlemagne. Another set of stories, derived very indirectly from classical antiquity, was grouped about the siege of Troy. One of its members is the tale of Troilus and Cressida, a story unknown to Vergil, but included by medieval writers in a large Trojan cycle, and then detached again later for separate treatment by Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Shakespeare. The most conspicuous instance of this habit is the grouping of some of the best separate romances about the central figure of King Arthur. Some of the stories in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* had originally no connection with King Arthur. Tristram and Iseult, for instance, was a well developed separate story. As Malory tells it, it still has very slight connection. But the medieval French romancers whom Malory followed liked to give their work large scope, and to further its popularity, by connecting separate stories with some single popular romantic hero. Thus arose an Arthurian

cycle which included in one composition many of the most popular medieval romances.

This process of grouping had already been at work before the formation of the great cycles of Charlemagne, Troy, Alexander, and Arthur. Not only were the cycles composed of tales originally separate; but these component tales themselves consisted of groups of separate smaller tales. A capital instance of this is the romance of Lancelot. It forms part of the great Arthurian cycle; but it is a cycle within itself. It is composed of many separate adventures, some of which had originally nothing to do with Lancelot, and were ascribed to him by some French romancer in order to expand the composition and to take advantage of the interest in a popular hero. One of the best remembered of Lancelot's adventures, as told by Malory and again by Tennyson, is the three-days' tournament. Lancelot appears as an unknown knight, first in red arms, then in white, then in green, wins the prize each time, and finally declares his identity. Not only is the adventure told of other knights in other romances, but it forms by itself a separate romance, as in the tale of Ipomedon. If we search still farther, we find that it is a wide-spread folk-tale, and still farther back a fairy story. Some medieval rewriter, finding the adventure of the three-days' tournament good literary material, added it to his version of the Lancelot story, and there it stayed. In like manner the Lancelot story was enriched by adventures formerly ascribed to Gawain, who had already lost some of his deeds to Percival. And such was the popularity of Lancelot as a hero that the winning of the Grail, which had very early been added to the Percival story, was eventually taken away to be given to Lancelot's son Galahad. Gawain was overshadowed by Percival and Lancelot, and all three were taken over bodily to pay tribute to Arthur.

This sounds like confusion worse confounded; but it is the way in which many medieval cycles were compiled. Confusing it is indeed to those who wish to discover in any case the original form; but it is not confusing to any one reading a romance for literary enjoyment. Who the hero is, after all makes very little difference. Be he Tristram, Gawain, or Lancelot, he is very much the same. The interest is not so much in his individual character as in his adventures. The more adventures, the better, thought the middle age. So it came about that many popular medieval romances are groups of groups, wheels within wheels, made up by selecting and adapting adventures from various sources. And the preëminence of the Arthurian group is due, not only to the purely romantic character of its material, but also to its having combined a very large number of popular stories.

(*c*) THE GRAIL LEGEND IN THE ARTHURIAN CYCLE [1]

But the most popular of all romantic legends and the one which added most, perhaps, to the vitality of the Arthurian cycle, is the legend of the Holy Grail. As every knight had his quest, and every quest was based upon the knightly ideal of constant and devoted service, so there was one supreme quest, the quest of the Grail. He who should win this quest must be, not only without fear, but also without reproach. As the story grew, it even demanded that he should be without sin. For the Holy Grail story set up beyond the attainment of earthly love the realization of heavenly love, the vision of heaven, a glimpse on earth of the beatific vision of the saints in light. Beyond all earthly and material quests was set up this spiritual quest. Except the *Divina Commedia*,

[1] The development of the Grail legend is conveniently summarized by Alfred Nutt, *The Legends of the Holy Grail* (Popular Studies in Romance and Folklore, number 14, London, 1902).

the Grail story is the supreme literary effort of medieval religion. Instead of the unseen things of fairies, magicians, or witches, it offers the unseen things of God, those "unseen things which are eternal." Its vitality is the vitality of spiritual aspiration.

When Christ was crucified, so the story grew to tell, the wounding lance and a cup that received the blood and water from the wounded side, were preserved by Joseph of Arimathea. These relics of Christ's passion were handed down to successive guardians, and the cup became known as the Grail. The Grail was guarded in a mysterious castle, now here, now there, in various early forms of the legend, but always remote, and usually located, like other mysteries of romance, in Britain. No man could even find this castle if he cherished his sins; no man could make his way past the lions at the entrance until he had made himself "clean of his life." The few who were finally found worthy were rewarded by a glimpse of the mystic chalice, by echoes of the music of heaven, and by a taste of the food of angels. The story of the Grail is the romance of spiritual struggle and spiritual reward.

In a word, it is a parable of the Mass. It is the central rite of the Church, the Holy Communion, interpreted in the symbols of a story. Repentance, absolution, the long struggle of self-mastery, the sustaining grace of the great sacrament, the reward of heavenly vision, are expressed in terms of knighthood, are brought home in the romance of a quest. What the *Pilgrim's Progress* centuries afterward did for Protestantism, the *Holy Grail* did for medieval Catholicism. It put religion into a story of aspiration, struggle, and attainment. As all romance is ideal, so this romance is most ideal of all; and as the idealism of romance is its most vital quality, so this highest ideal of romance has lived through all the centuries and won all Christian peoples.

Beginning crudely in glimmering half-realizations, it was quickly defined and heightened as it seized the imaginations of successive romancers, and won the admiration of eager readers. First attaching itself to the stories of Gawain, perhaps, it was quickly found more congenial to the stories of Percival, the boy reared apart from men by his mother in the wild wood. Percival became the Grail hero, the pure knight who alone was found worthy of the heavenly vision. The increasing popularity of the Lancelot stories led some romancer, not to attach the Grail quest to him, for he was a sinner, but to invent for him a son Galahad pure enough to rise so high. In spite of this, the Grail story remained in the popular imagination attached to Percival.[1] The literary attempt to give the honor to another hero shows two things. First, even the overshadowing popularity of Lancelot was not sufficient to permit any violation of the sacred character of the Grail story. No romancer dared to say that the Grail was won by a sinner. Secondly, the popularity of the Grail story is evident. Popularity was the reason for the attempt to combine it with other popular stories. And this popularity it has kept down to our own day. Tennyson and Wagner, utterly unlike otherwise, alike testify to the vitality of the Holy Grail.

[1] For the medieval German Percival see *Parzival, a Knightly Epic by Wolfram von Eschenbach*, for the first time translated into English verse from the original German by Jessie L. Weston, London, 1894, 2 volumes.

CHAPTER III

THE FORMS OF ROMANCE IN MEDIEVAL FRENCH AND LATIN

It is evident that some of the romancers of this period were literary artists. They studied, and they practised with variety and skill, the art of story-telling. But before we can rightly measure the art of individuals, or understand clearly the forms in which they composed, we must appreciate a common literary habit of the time. This was the age, as has been said, of great world-wide stories, taken up from land to land. Some of them were new to the extent of having been previously unknown to readers, of being set down for the first time from the oral versions of common people. Many of them were old to the extent of having been both commonly heard before and also written and read. Very few of them indeed were new in the sense of having been invented by their writers. What was new, if anything at all was new, was not the matter of the tale, but the form, the way in which it was told. The romancer's originality, if he had any, consisted in some clearer or more interesting combination of incidents, or in a livelier or more graceful style. Originality in the sense of invention, of making up a story out of one's head as in our modern time, was rarely thought of. On the contrary, a writer usually took credit for holding faithfully, so far as matter went, to old books. There was so little distinction between legend and record, between what we now call history and what we call story, that romancers as well as his-

torians were accustomed to declare themselves, not at all inventors of new matter — far from it — but faithful transmitters of the old. The literary habit of the age was, not invention, but transmission.

But this wide transmission of romances differed, of course, with different romancers. Some were little more than paraphrasers or translators. They varied from the form of their originals as much by blunder as by design. Being thus mechanical, their work has no literary value, though it often serves to show how popular a story was by preserving it in many manuscripts. Other romancers expanded or intensified an old story by borrowing from another story, or combined two different versions, subordinating some incidents and filling out others. These romancers, that is, undertook, not merely transmission, but also composition. They did not invent new material, but they did modify the old form; and, according to their success in shaping, they have literary merit. And finally, a few romancers treated their material as ore to be melted in their imaginations and recast in new form. Looking in an old story for some main interest and significance, and disregarding, when they chose, the order of incidents in their sources, they selected and combined freely in order to gain their desired effects. Not yet as Chaucer reshaped the old story of Troilus and Cressida, or Shakespeare reshaped the old story of Cæsar, but nevertheless originally, they told an old tale in a new way. Though they rarely added new incidents of their own invention, they achieved an original and literary whole. They were original, not as inventors, but as shapers. They studied how to please their readers by methods calculated to produce surprise or suspense or satisfaction in the outcome. They planned their stories to awaken, and then increase, and then satisfy a reader's sympathy. By applying to romance definite

methods adapted to definite impressions of artistic pleasure, and by experimenting in different forms, they brought story-telling forward as an art.

By such methods romance differs from romance in literary value. Some of the best, for instance the exquisite *Aucassin and Nicolete*, are anonymous, or are ascribed to authors of whom we know little more than the name. Others, doubtless, have brought credit to the wrong author, since research has found more than once that an admirable version in one language is only a translation or a paraphrase from another whose author is unknown. Among the French of France we are sure of the fame of Chrétien de Troyes; among those of England, of Marie de France. These, with Walter Map, who may have been a Welshman, are of the twelfth century. The Germans Gottfried von Strassburg and Wolfram von Eschenbach followed soon after in the thirteenth. But in the dearth of biography and the uncertainty of authorship we may be content with the certainty that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were a time of great literary activity, not only in the number of romances, but also in the art of romance.

1. LONG, OR COLLECTIVE ROMANCES

Between the long prose romances and the long verse romances there is little difference of literary effect. The long verse romances do not make their appeal primarily as poetry. Between the verse and the prose there is often no marked difference except a rather monotonous metre and rime; and the value of both alike is mainly the value of the story as a story.

But there is sometimes a real difference, a difference of literary effect, between the long romances and the short romances. A medieval romance was made long, as we

have seen, by accumulation. Thus a popular story might grow longer and longer by gradually adding adventures previously told of other heroes (page 81), until it developed into a cycle. The Arthurian cycle as finally compiled in English by Sir Thomas Malory covers eight hundred and sixty-one large pages of print. This is a very late form; but it is none the less typical of a general tendency. A fourteenth-century *Lancelot*,[1] made up of the Lancelot story proper, the story of Merlin, and the Death of Arthur, has about the same length. An earlier French version of the *Merlin* [2] alone has over twenty thousand lines. The leisurely readers of the time liked stories told so. They liked to hear all — the hero's parentage, his birth and breeding, his early promise, his knighting, his friends, his falling in love, and the more adventures the better. Thus romances became long by covering many years and many adventures. Sometimes also they were made long by descanting on love. The feelings of the lover and his lady might be described in great detail and with great relish. The courtliness and constancy of the knight were regarded as important enough to be exhibited many times.[3] But typically a romance was long because it was collective.

In this our modern taste differs from the taste of the middle age. Centuries of drama, with its necessary compactness and swiftness, have tended to make us impatient of the medieval deliberation. Accustomed now-a-days to stories that move along a single line of action to a climax, we

[1] Ward, *Catalogue of Romances*, page 352. [2] *Ibid.*, page 343.

[3] A survival of such elaboration is the early fifteenth-century *Livre du Duc des Vrays Amans* of Christine de Pisan (*The Book of the Duke of True Lovers*, translated, with an introduction, by Alice Kemp-Welch, London, 1908). The habit began in the poetry of courtly love (page 63).

sometimes find the old romances confusing or tedious. But we must remember that this modern view of story-telling was not the view of the middle age. And if we can read the long old romances for that different kind of pleasure which they sought, the pleasure in many adventures and in generous ideals, we may still find in them some solace for our hurrying age.

2. SHORT, OR SELECTIVE ROMANCES

(*a*) UNDEVELOPED SHORT ROMANCES

Such romances as were short merely because they were undeveloped are hardly distinct in form; they are merely equivalent to the component parts of the long romances, the single beads of the string. Thus a charming poem by Marie de France[1] called *Honeysuckle* is merely an episode of the Tristram story. Iseult, finding a peeled wand by her way through the wood, knew that Tristram was near. Even to readers familiar with the whole Tristram story, the *Honeysuckle* must have appealed rather as lyric than as narrative. As a story it is not complete in itself, but rather a stray bit of romantic material. Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* has many such bits, some of them, like this of Marie's, keeping

[1] The charm of Marie de France's *lais* as poetry is delightfully suggested by the metrical versions of Prof. Frederick B. Luquiens, *Three Lays of Marie de France retold in English Verse*, New York, 1911 (*Lanval, Ash Tree, Two Lovers*). There is a bibliography and a valuable introduction. Prose translations are as follows: Edith Rickert, *Marie de France, Seven of Her Lays*, London, 1901 (*Guigemar, Ash Tree, Two Lovers, Yonec, Nightingale, Honeysuckle, Eliduc*); Jessie L. Weston, *Four Lays of Marie de France and Others*, London, 1900 (*Guingamor, Lanval, Tyolet, Bisclaveret* or the *Werewolf*); Alice Kemp-Welch, *Eliduc*, in the *Monthly Review* for July, 1901; Eugene Mason, *French Mediæval Romances*, Everyman's Library. *Lays of France* (founded on the Lays of Marie) by Arthur O'Shaughnessy, London, 2d ed., 1874 (*Nightingale, Two Lovers, Eliduc, Yonec*) is a free and elaborated paraphrase.

a strong flavor of their origin in Celtic folk-lore. His story of Henno (translated at page 60) is in this regard like Marie's *Yonec*, a fairy tale whose incidents are given in rapid summary without development in detail. Others, like her *Two Lovers*, are local legends. As narrative, Marie's verse is like Walter's prose. All her *lais* have a pretty sentiment and now and then a touch of passion; but most of them are undeveloped as stories. Literary in verse and phrase, they are not recast in form. The legends have been charmingly rendered; they have hardly been recomposed.

(*b*) EXEMPLA

Many other short tales in the middle age, as in any other age, are told as illustrative anecdotes. These have such unity as arises from their very object of enforcing a point, or drawing a moral. But since this object is not primarily literary, and since the composition necessary to achieve it is a simple art, the anecdote can hardly be called a literary form. It is worth considering here only because it appears under the name *exemplum* in medieval collections [1] designed to furnish illustrations for instruction. Its commonest use

[1] See H. S. Canby, *The Short Story in English*, New York, 1909, chapter ii, and the corresponding list of books at pages 352–354. The best known of these collections is the Latin prose *Gesta Romanorum*, by an English compiler of the late thirteenth century. A fifteenth-century English translation has been edited (1879) for the Early English Text Society. There is a modern translation by Swan (London, preface by T. Wright, 1871). *Medieval Tales*, edited by H. Morley (London, 1884, Universal Library), has selections. For the *Golden Legend* see below. The collection of John Bromyard, *Summa Predicantium*, is arranged alphabetically under topics. See *The Exempla, or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. T. F. Crane (London, 1890), and *The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England*, J. A. Mosher (New York, Columbia University Press, 1911).

has always been in sermons; and, in sermons or elsewhere, it usually has little value of literary form. Our interest in it is simply for what it tells, not for any pleasure in the way of telling. True, among the *exempla* one finds occasionally a tale as striking as this by Walter Map:

But for other men the monastic life turns out otherwise. Far more pitiable was the fate of a noble and eloquent man who, likewise a monk of the same community, was in the same case recalled to arms. Enduring many reverses of battle with a noble fortitude, he was always reanimated by defeat to fight again, and, inflamed as it were with new ardor, would fly at the enemy the more fiercely, and whether they fled or held their ground, would indefatigably stick to them like glue. When the enemy thought to crush him by the size of their company, they found that victory goes to bravery, not to numbers. Burning with wrath, therefore, and increasing their force many fold, they surprised him in a valley hemmed between two cliffs, and had him almost trapped. No hope, for he was caught; no issue, for he was held; they went to work the more leisurely because the more securely. But he, bursting into their midst like a tempest, scatters them like dust in a whirlwind, and so stupefies them by his daring that they see nothing to do but run. Promptly he hangs on their rear with his band, small enough in comparison with theirs; and the throng of the enemy, in the effort to save their lords from him, becomes the prize of a single monk. But one leader of that attack, after escaping, makes a detour ahead and, mingling unrecognized with the monk's men, works back steadily toward the monk, risking his own life to take his. The monk, almost stifled with toil and sun, calls his page, enters a vineyard, doffs his armor, and, while his band passes on, stretches himself half-stripped to the air under the shade of a tall vine. Then the skulker, leaving the line of march and slipping up stealthily step by step, pierces the monk with a deadly dart and escapes. The monk, knowing himself near death, confesses his sins to the page, the only person within reach, bidding him impose penance. He, being a layman, swears he knows not how. But

the monk, extreme in his penitence as in everything, says: "Impose upon me by the mercy of God, dearest son, that in the name of Jesus Christ my soul may be in hell doing penance up to the day of judgment; so that then the Lord may have mercy upon me, lest with the wicked I behold the countenance of His wrath and anger." Then replies the boy with tears, "My lord, I impose upon thee for penance that which here before the Lord thy lips have uttered." And he, accepting with word and look, devoutly received the penance and died.

Here let us remember the words of mercy, In whatsoever hour a sinner shall repent, he shall be saved. Wherein he might have repented and did not, whether he omitted anything possible, we may discuss; and God have mercy on his soul.

Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, I, xiv.

But even this, striking as it is, is short simply because it is summarized. It is not composed to be complete in itself. We say of it at once, That *would make* a good story. It is the material for a story rather than the finished form. Like many later authors, Map jotted down such incidents for future use. His *De Nugis Curialium*[1] is partly a note-book. This tragic tale, like others of his, seems sketched, indeed, as if for further use than as a mere *exemplum* in a sermon; but it is sketched, not finished. The difference becomes clear when we place it beside those few tales which he did work up into finished literary form. Even the best of the *exempla* are too summary to constitute a distinct narrative form.

(1) *Legends of the Virgin and the Saints*

The *exempla* are most commonly stories of the Virgin or of the Saints. Thus the anecdote of *The Covetous Man and*

[1] This book is certainly Walter's. What share he had in the development of the Grail legend is still matter of dispute and speculation.

the Envious Man is connected with St. Martin of Tours. Others, more definitely localized, seem intended to explain or promote local cults, just as some longer romances sprang from the local shrines along the route of pilgrimage to the great shrine of St. James of Compostella. Of this class of *exempla* some of the most winsome tell of the intervention of the Virgin. *The Knight Who Prayed whilst Our Lady Tourneyed in His Stead*[1] is typical of the *exemplum* method. The story is taken from the *Golden Legend* (*Legenda Aurea*), a widely current collection of the thirteenth century compiled by Jacopo de Voragine[2] in sections corresponding to the saints' days and other holy days of the Christian year. There is stronger human pathos in the *Tumbler of Our Lady*,[3] the story of a mountebank converted and retired to a monastery. Confused and ashamed at his ignorance of holy ways, but full of zeal, he went secretly to the Lady Chapel in the crypt and there performed alone before the altar his best gymnastic feats. The most beautiful English "miracle of Our Lady" is Chaucer's tale of the *Prioress* (page 220).

[1] Translated in Eugene Mason's *Aucassin and Nicolette and other Medieval Romances and Legends* (London and New York, 1910, Everyman's Library). This well-chosen collection contains other *exempla*, short romances of both types, a lay, and an oriental tale, in all sixteen pieces. Three of these and one other are in *Old French Romances* done into English by William Morris (London and New York, 1896).

[2] A Dominican preacher, Archbishop of Genoa 1292, died 1298. Caxton's fifteenth-century English version of the *Golden Legend* has been reprinted in Temple Classics. See further Schofield's *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, page 394, and the references in the foot-notes above.

[3] Translated, with introduction and notes, by Alice Kemp-Welch, *Of the Tumbler of Our Lady and Other Miracles* (London, 1908). The volume contains also *The Knight Who Prayed*, and is translated mainly from the thirteenth-century *Miracles de la Sainte Vierge* of Gautier de Coinci. Three of the nine tales are in Mason's collection cited above.

(c) THE SELECTIVE ROMANCE AS A DISTINCTLY DEVELOPED FORM: MARIE DE FRANCE AND WALTER MAP

Some few of the best medieval romances, on the other hand, are short, not because they are undeveloped, but because they are developed in a way different from that of the long romances. They are composed, not by accumulation, but by selection for a single narrative effect. Such is the thirteenth-century French verse romance *La Chastelaine de Vergi*[1] (1280–1288).

The Chatelaine of Vergi was ardently loved by a knight, and gave him her love in turn on condition that he keep it an inviolable secret. The Duchess, wife of his lord, seeking his love and finding him cold to her advances, in revenge accused him to the Duke. Declaring his innocence in vain, the knight incautiously took oath to tell the Duke the whole truth, and was thus driven to betray his love of the Chatelaine. The Duke, though he swore secrecy, was so harassed by the jealous Duchess that he in turn betrayed the secret to her. The Chatelaine, on being taunted by the Duchess, died for shame and grief. The knight, finding her dead, killed himself at her feet; and the Duke in his wrath killed the Duchess.

Even so bald a summary will show here a distinct narrative form. This romance of 956 verses is short because the author meant it to be short. He had no intention of working it up further. He has worked it up. It is complete, finished as it stands. It would gain nothing by being longer. Instead of rehearsing the previous history of his personages and giving them other adventures, he has compressed his tragedy into a single situation. By this limitation he has given himself room for a greater abundance of detail, and consequently for

[1] *The Chatelaine of Vergi*, a thirteenth-century French romance, done into English by Alice Kemp-Welch (London, 1903). The volume contains the French text, and an introduction by Dr. L. Brandin.

more vivid description, than was possible by the method of covering many years in summary. In such cases a medieval author, instead of covering many years of adventures, or bringing in many persons and places, focuses our attention upon a single course of action moving to a climax within a comparatively short time. The details, though more abundant than in any part of a long romance, all serve to give a single impression.

The idea of a long romance is the simple pleasure of many marvels and of variety; the idea of such a short romance as the *Chastelaine* is the more artificial pleasure of unity. Since the latter was not the kind of pleasure most desired in the middle age, short romances of this kind were comparatively few. But what was done in the thirteenth century by the author of the *Chastelaine de Vergi* had been done already in the twelfth century by Walter Map in two Latin tales of strong conciseness and brilliant vividness: *De Societate Sadii et Galonis*, and *De Sceva et Ollone Mercatoribus*.[1] It was approached in the best known, and perhaps the loveliest, tale of the middle ages, *Aucassin and Nicolete*[2]; for though in its combination of verse and prose this is unique, and though it goes beyond its natural close into an extraneous appendix of adventures,[3] it belongs in its main lines to the same class. Very few other instances can be found in prose; but in verse the form is approached also by Marie de France's *Lanval* and *Eliduc*. Her Lanval story having come down to us as told by another romancer under the title *Graalent*,[4] we can

[1] Both in *De Nugis Curialium*.

[2] Among the translations of *Aucassin and Nicolete* Andrew Lang's keeps its distinction.

[3] This is probably a later addition, not part of the story as originally composed.

[4] Reprinted in Mason's collection. See foot-note above.

see the superiority of her version in narrative art. Whether she merely had the discernment to choose a version already thus told, or herself reshaped the story, is not easy to determine. But there can be little doubt as to Walter Map. His collection so distinctly shows him experimenting with several narrative forms that we must suppose him to have planned his two strongest tales with conscious art. Not until modern times did this terser and more intense narrative form win wide popular recognition; but it was consciously practised by some of the best literary artists of the very prime of romance.

(d) CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES

The art of the selective romance is seen at greater length in Chrétien de Troyes [1] (latter half of the twelfth century). Running to five and six thousand lines, his *Erec* and *Chevalier au Lion* are in length midway between the *Chastelaine of Vergi* or *Aucassin and Nicolete* and the typical long romance. But in form they show something of the art of the selective short romance. Chrétien's *Erec* tells the tale which Lady Charlotte Guest translated in her *Mabinogion* as *Geraint the Son of Erbin* from a later Welsh version, and which Tennyson rewrote from her translation for his *Idylls of the King* as *Geraint and Enid.* Since the incidents are substantially the same in all three, the modern reader may get some idea of how the tale differs from the long romances in form.

[1] *Erec*, *Cligés*, *Yvain*, and *Lancelot* are translated into prose by W. W. Comfort (Everyman's Library, 1914; introduction, notes, bibliography). *Erec* and *Yvain* are paraphrased in W. W. Newell's *King Arthur and the Table Round* (Boston and New York, 1897). The medieval English translation of *Yvain* (*Ywain and Gawain*, first half of the fourteenth century) has been edited by G. Schleich (Oppeln & Leipzig, 1887), who has also studied its relation to the original.

The Welsh version keeps the Celtic tradition of fondness for details of color. Thus enters the hero:

> The rider was a fair-haired youth, bare-legged, and of princely mien; and a golden-hilted sword was at his side, and a robe and a surcoat of satin were upon him, and two low shoes of leather upon his feet; and around him was a scarf of blue purple, at each corner of which was a golden apple. And his horse stepped stately and swift and proud.
>
> Lady Charlotte Guest, *The Mabinogion, Geraint the Son of Erbin.*

Enid is stricken with shame that Geraint's love of her should run to ignoble fondness. Her lament, overheard and mistaken by Geraint, rouses his jealous pride to prove her long and cruelly. This moment the Welsh writer sees in its setting:

> And one morning in the summer time they were upon their couch, and Geraint lay upon the edge of it. And Enid was without sleep in the apartment, which had windows of glass. And the sun shone upon the couch. And the clothes had slipped from off his arms and his breast, and he was asleep. Then she gazed upon the marvellous beauty of his appearance, and she said, "Alas! and am I the cause that these arms and this breast have lost their glory and the warlike fame which they once so richly enjoyed?" And as she said this, the tears dropped from her eyes, and they fell upon his breast.
>
> *Ibid.*

In such a place the Welsh writer's abundance of description is not merely pretty; it is fitting. What he thus dwells upon until we must feel it because we can see it, is an important moment of the story. But in general the Welshman blurs his story by spending equal elaboration on what is quite subordinate, or even irrelevant. The entrance of Arthur's forester is marked by quite as much detail as that

of Geraint; and the preparations for the hunting of the white stag that he reports are given in spite of the fact that Geraint did not go. The incidents claim attention equally in succession; Chrétien's are lengthened or shortened with a keen sense of narrative values. For Chrétien, relying less on such purely picturesque description, has far better narrative. Using descriptive detail less for itself, he uses it more to bring out character or heighten the important moments of the story. What is passed over rapidly would not add to our main interest in the proving of Enid, or enhance our sympathetic appreciation of her character; what is dwelt upon and elaborated in detail serves just this purpose of focusing our interest. Instead of merely accumulating adventures and telling each for what it is worth by itself, he has some notion of selecting adventures and of telling them in such a way as will keep our interest in the conquest of the proud, selfish devotion of the husband by the nobler devotion of the wife. And at the end he impresses the significance of the whole course of adventures, the meaning of the story as a whole. He felt, and he makes us feel, something of the narrative force of unity.

The same idea of unity, of making a story give, not simply many adventures, but one main impression, appears in Chrétien's *Chevalier au Lion* (Knight of the Lion), called also, from the name of its hero, *Yvain*. Here again there are three versions; but all three are medieval. The Welsh version, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest in her *Mabinogion* as *The Lady of the Fountain*, stands in the same relation to Chrétien's *Chevalier au Lion* as *Geraint the Son of Erbin* to his *Erec;* i.e., in each case we seem to have, not a translation, but a parallel version from a common source.[1] At

[1] This is still disputed; but Foerster's theory of translation has not been accepted.

any rate, the differences of treatment are typically the same. The Welsh version in each case has more color and less focus. Descriptively richer, it is narratively poorer. The details are merely abundant. They are not used, as by Chrétien, to bring out character and situation; and the incidents are not so well arranged to give the story movement up to a culmination. But the medieval English *Ywain and Gawain* (first part of the fourteenth century; see foot-note to page 97) is a translation, and in several ways a very good one. It keeps, not only every incident of the *Chevalier au Lion*, but the same narrative plan and transitions. Yet it reduces the scale by one third, telling in 4032 lines what Chrétien tells in 6802 of about the same length. A comparison of the two shows both the freedom of medieval translation and also some of the distinctive traits of Chrétien's method. The following summary of the English translation gives all the incidents in both:

In order to avenge the defeat of his cousin, Sir Colgrevance, by a mysterious knight, Ywain, a knight of Arthur's court, rides forth into the forest until he reaches a well near a chapel. Following directions, he dips water from this well into a golden basin and pours it upon a stone near by. A tempest at once arises. After its subsidence the knight appears, engages Ywain in combat, and receives a mortal wound. Ywain pursues the knight into a castle, whose portcullis falls, killing Ywain's steed.

A damsel, Lunet, to whom Ywain once showed courtesy, saves him from the vengeance of the knight's vassals by the gift of a ring of invisibility. From his hiding place Ywain sees the lady of the castle, as in great sorrow she follows her lord to his grave; and Love wounds him sorely. Lunet persuades the lady to marry Ywain in order that he may protect her lands from Arthur. Ywain is visited by Arthur and his knights. Yielding to the persuasions of Gawain, he craves permission of his wife to return to Arthur's court in order to win more fame in "chivalry." She consents,

giving him a ring that will protect him from harm, but commands him to return in exactly a year. The year is spent in riding about engaging in many tournaments. Saint John's day, the time for return, is past when Ywain remembers his wife's command. A messenger from her denounces his falseness, and takes away the ring. Ywain goes mad from sorrow and leads a wild life in the woods. He is finally cured by a damsel who anoints him with magic ointment.

Going forth into the forest, Ywain saves from a dragon a lion, who henceforth follows him devotedly and in his subsequent adventures gives him indispensable aid. Coming again to the chapel, he finds Lunet confined there. Unless she can find a champion, she is to be burned the next day on the charge of treason to her lady. Ywain offers to fight for her. He goes that night to a castle, and next morning kills a giant who comes against it. He then hastens back to the chapel, where he arrives barely in time to save Lunet.

Ywain next becomes the champion of a maiden whose elder sister refuses her her share of their inheritance. As the knight, the lion, and the damsel journey to Arthur's court, they pass a night at the castle of "Heavy Sorrow." Before setting forth the next morning, Ywain is obliged to fight two champions, whom he overcomes after a terrific combat, thus freeing many noble maidens, hostages who are toiling as silk-weavers. After Ywain's arrival at court, Ywain and Gawain, each unknown to the other, fight as champions of the two sisters. Ceasing their strokes when the light fails, each learns the other's name, and each declares before the king that he has been overcome. Arthur decides that the younger sister shall hold her lands as a fief under the elder, thus decreeing the first division of land ever made in England.

Ywain, feeling that if he is not reconciled to his lady he must go mad or die, returns to the well and raises such a storm that Alundyne in her castle feels great terror. Lunet tells her that they greatly need to defend them one like the famous Knight of the Lion. This knight and his lady, Lunet says, have quarreled, and he will not fight for anyone who will not swear to do her utmost to effect

a reconciliation. This Alundyne swears upon holy relics to do. Lunet brings Ywain to her and tells her his name. They are finally reconciled, and Ywain, Alundyne, Lunet, and the lion live happily until their lives' end. — Anna H. Billings, *A Guide to the Middle English Metrical Romances* (Yale Studies in English, ix), pages 154–156.

The summary gives some idea of *Ywain and Gawain;* it gives hardly any idea of the *Chevalier au Lion.* Yet at first reading the translator seems to have left nothing out. When we look more carefully, we discover that, though he has lost nothing of the story as a story, he has compressed, or modified, or even omitted, the detail. And since Chrétien's detail is not merely added for richness, but spent to bring out character or mood, a change here is a change in the total effect, a shifting of interest from the persons to the events. Thus to Chrétien the central situation is this. A widow forced to marry again, as medieval widows were if they had property, accepts the slayer of her husband. How would she feel? Might she not, from making a virtue of necessity, come to love her second husband if he were young and brave? If, tiring of her riches and ease, he would be off to his wars again, would she forgive him for breaking his promise to return on a day? And might he not then, learning from the loss of her to value her truly, devote himself to winning her back by proving his better manhood? The situation is almost the reverse of that in *Erec.* Such questions of character and feeling lead Chrétien to dwell upon the scenes between Ywain and Alundyne, and even to comment satirically now and then on their mental attitudes. Most of this the English translator omits.

Nor is the omission stupid. The translator threw the emphasis where he felt his own interest — in the movement of the story.

Now is the lion outbroken.
His master shall full soon be wroken.
With full fell rush the twain he sought.
To pray for peace availed them naught.
One savage straight he leaped upon,
And to the earth he bare him down.
Then was there none about that place
That was not fain of that fair chase.
The maiden had great joy in soul.
They said, "He shall never again be whole."
His fellow hasted with might and main
To raise him smartly up again;
And right so, as he stooped to lift,
Sir Ywain with his brand was swift
And struck his neck-bone right asunder.
Thereof had all the people wonder.
The head went trundling upon the sand.
Thus had Ywain the higher hand. 3243–3260 (modernized).

What makes a story quick and strong he understands so well that he even quickens and varies Chrétien's pace by throwing some of the indirect discourse into direct dialogue. Here and there, as in the passage above, he adds a touch of his own. Ywain bade his lion, says Chrétien, go back from the combat and lie quiet; and the lion did so in his way (*a sa devise*). The Englishman renders:

He bad his lyoun go to rest;
And he laid him sone onane
Doun byfore þam everilkane.
Bitwene his legges he layd his tail,
And so biheld to þe batayl. (2592–2596.)

"What are thou that mournest here," says a damsel to Ywain during his wandering in the wild wood; and the eloquent first words of the reply are not in the original: "A

man, he sayd, sum tyme I was." At the end of the poem, when Alundyne discovers that the knight whom she has promised to accord with his wife is Ywain, her own repentant husband, Chrétien says simply that she started (*la dame tresaut*). The Englishman says:

> Then went the lady far aback,
> And long she stood ere that she spake. (3983–3984.)

Such touches, few though they are, show that the English translator could not have been insensible to Chrétien's use of detail for the suggestion of character or mood. He translated with unusual intelligence and spirit, not literally, but with substantial accuracy. His omissions must have been deliberate. Nevertheless they help us to see better Chrétien's delicacy of art. Chrétien is superior, not only in verse and style, but in clear fulness of personal detail and in finer touches of characterization. The translator keeps the whole value of the plan and transitions which hold the tale together; he does not keep the whole value of the situation. His work is like a strong black-and-white copy of a painting.

3. FABLIAUX

A more popular form of short verse-tale was the *fableau* or *fabliau*. This differs from romance in having for its characters, not only knights and ladies, but tradespeople and students, and in a tone of broad comedy tending toward farce. Though the *fabliaux* are often satirical, their object is evidently, not ridicule for the sake of correction, but laughter for its own sake, sheer amusement at some clever trick. They are such humorous tales as in all ages some men have permitted themselves after dining too well. Though they are thus trivial and often base in substance, they are nevertheless very skilful in narrative form. An amusing

intrigue, such as that of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, is made to hold attention by a narrative movement more rapid than is to be found in any other contemporary form of story-telling. That focusing on a single situation which is seen in the best short romances is often carried in the *fabliaux* to the extent of compressing the incidents of the story within twenty-four hours on a single scene and filling this little space with uninterrupted action. The impression of rapidity is enhanced by dialogue and by ingenious complication and solution. In a word, the *fabliaux* prevail by sheer force of plot.[1]

4. HISTORIES

Some of the histories written during this period are indistinguishable in either matter or form from the romances; for *historia* then included legend as well as fact, and there was not the opportunity, even where there was the desire, for much research of our modern sort. Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* (pages 62, 73) makes little distinction between legend and fact. Some of the medieval chronicles are as full of marvels as the romances. Some of them contain the same stories. The descent of the kings of Britain from the Trojan heroes, a fancy very popular in England during the early medieval period, is set forth in the histories and in the romances with equal gravity. The *Historia Regum*

[1] The standard French collection is Montaiglon and Raynaud's *Receuil général et complet des fabliaux* (Paris, 1872–1890); the standard French discussion, J. Bédier's *Les fabliaux* (Paris, second edition, 1895). Among the best of English *fabliaux* are Chaucer's Canterbury Tales of the *Miller* and the *Reeve*. For the narrative skill of the *fabliaux* see H. S. Canby's *The Short Story in English*, pages 46–53, and two studies by W. M. Hart: *The Reeve's Tale, — a Comparative Study of Chaucer's Narrative Art;* and *The Fabliau and Popular Literature* (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, xxiii, pages 1 and 329).

Britanniæ of Geoffrey of Monmouth (page 78) was a chief means of disseminating for the glory of the new England the early forms of the Arthur legend. It was followed in the French verse of Wace, who was followed in turn by the Englishman Layamon [1] (page 139). Though none of the histories attained the scholarly handling seen in Bede, some of them had historical sense enough to protest against the romancing of Geoffrey. In form the histories are usually little more than chronicles; but William of Malmesbury's Latin prose (first half of the twelfth century) has some attractions, not only of style, but even of composition.[2]

5. SATIRES

Every period of romance shows some writings that rebel against the habit of the time, oppose to the idealism of romance the facts of real life, and especially turn romance to ridicule. In the sixteenth century "Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away." While English people in the early nineteenth century were devouring the wild romances of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen made quiet fun of both the books and their readers in her *Northanger Abbey*. Scott wrote *Ivanhoe;* Thackeray wrote *Rebecca and Rowena*. So it has been often; and so it was at the beginning. Even while medieval literature seemed entirely devoted to knights and ladies, to courtly love and chivalrous adventures, there were clever writers and willing readers to turn all this to satire. For satire is always the foe of romance; and satire always opposes to romance the facts of every-day life. Nor

[1] Both the French and the English chronicle are translated into modern English prose by Eugene Mason, *Arthurian Chronicles* (London and New York, 1912, Everyman's Library).

[2] For a review of Latin histories written in England, see *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, volume I, chapter ix.

indeed were the readers and the writers of satire always different from the readers and writers of romance. Walter Map wrote both; and doubtless many a knight and lady, tired for the time of *Tristram*, enjoyed *Reynard the Fox*. For romance and satire may be two moods of the same age, or of the same person.

But medieval satire was aimed not so much against romance in general as against the romantic idealizing of women. Women, said the satires, are so far from deserving chivalrous devotion as to be creatures of impulse, basely passionate, fickle because they are essentially untrue. The coarseness of such attacks has been ascribed to the fact that some of the authors were celibate monks; but it should be ascribed rather to the actual defects of chivalric society. The satires show the seamy side of chivalry, the failure of men, in a society still partly ruled by violence, to rule themselves by their ideals. Imperfect as these ideals often seem in the romances, they are noble and generous. The lapses from them in the actual relations of men and women were the subjects of the satires. Neither the ideal nor the lapse presents by itself the whole truth; but we may estimate the age more fairly as a whole by its aspirations than by its failures.

(a) Beast Tales

Among the satires are some popular medieval animal stories. Mr. Kipling's *Jungle Book* in our own time reminds us that some of the oldest stories in the world are the animal stories of India. Mr. Harris's *Nights with Uncle Remus* suggests obscure oral traditions from Africa. Like the fabliaux, the beast tales, though not always satires, are often satirical. For by the doings of beasts who act and talk like men they present the follies or shrewdness, the schemes, the failures, the revenges, of mankind. Such stories are very old in

every literature. The Uncle Remus stories of the cunning rabbit, the fierce and stupid wolf, the over-wise fox, come from far away and long ago. We like them, as every age and people has liked them, because they set before us wittily the common-sense of human kind, the wordly wisdom of real life.

The ape showed his apelet to the lion and asked him what he thought of it. "Like father, like son," replied the lion; "no joy of the one, no use in the other." The ape went off in a huff, came to the bear and asked him what he thought of the child. "Ah!" said the bear, "is this the beautiful baby I have heard so much of?" "Yes," replied the ape, "the very same." "Let me kiss him," said the bear. "I have been longing to see him." "You are my friend indeed," said the ape; "you take an interest in me." And the bear took the little ape and ate him. "Ah!" cried the ape, "shame on fair speech from a foul heart!" [1]

Every one will recognize at once this form of satire. It is a fable, and has its type in the *Fables* of Æsop. Indeed, collections of such fables were called *isopets*. Marie de France translated a hundred of them in her *Isopet* (1180); and the form has always kept a certain popularity; for the old fables were put into charming new form in the seventeenth century by La Fontaine, and English versions of Æsop, though they have not La Fontaine's appeal to mature minds, still please children.

A popular twelfth-century satire on monasteries and schools, the *Speculum Stultorum* of Nigel Wireker, is written as a fable of Burnel, the ass whose tail was too short. During this century and the following some of the best of the animal stories in verse were grouped about a central figure, the world-famous *Reynard the Fox*. This group

[1] Nicolas Bozon, quoted in G. Paris and E. Langlois, *Chrestomathie du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1897, page 163.

of satires, with its clear types of human nature, its witty dialogue, its criticism of manners, was popular for centuries in every country of Europe. Everybody knew the shifty Reynard, Noble the lion, Bruin the bear, Tibbet the cat, Chanticleer the cock, and all the rest, laughed over them, quoted them, learned from them common-sense. For these satires are rich in human character and worldly wisdom. Rejecting romantic ideals, they delight to show the seamy side of real life, its cowardice, its gullibility, and the triumphs of quackery and sharp practice. Taken by itself, satire may give a partial and ignoble view of human life; but, taken as an offset to romance, it tends to save dreaming from dissipation and extravagance.

CHAPTER IV

ROMANCE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH

While Latin held unquestioned place for works of philosophy and history, and French for literature (page 70), English still lived. English folk were too proud and conservative to let their native language die. Though it was written but little, though it was written for literary purposes still less, it was tenaciously spoken. And this holding fast to the English tongue had its reward when the French rulers of England, losing their power in France, centered their interests more and more at home. For the earliest Norman and Angevin kings the Channel was hardly a boundary. The French part of their realm being larger than the English part, they naturally kept their French feeling. But as the French possessions slipped away from them, while at the same time Englishmen and Frenchmen on the island were successfully united under a strong central government, there grew up a new English nation and a new English national feeling. Having received by intermarriage a large infusion of French blood, the new nation was no longer purely Germanic; but the persistence of Germanic ideals is shown by the preservation of the English language, then by its increasing use as a national expression, and finally by its supremacy.[1]

[1] Riȝt is, þat Inglische vnderstond,
Þat was born in Ingland.
Freynsche vse þis gentilman;
Ac euerich Inglische Inglische can.
Mani noble haue y seiȝe

Like the new nation, the new language that thus emerged was composite; but it kept its Germanic framework. Change would have come even without the Conquest. Languages do not stand still. During the same two centuries (1100–1300) French itself had changed. But in English the change was more rapid for two reasons. Treated as an inferior speech, and without sufficient use in literature to maintain a standard of correctness, it suffered more rapid changes from oral use. Spoken language is always looser and freer than written language. The seventeenth-century English of Bunyan, for instance, which as he first wrote it down is simply the colloquial speech of his time, is incorrect according to the use of his contemporaries in writing. And since in the two centuries after the Conquest there was no written standard, no English literature of scope and dignity enough to hold up a model of correct English, the inevitable changes of language were hastened. The conspicuous result was a general blurring of case-endings and tense-

> Þat no Freynsche couþe seye.
> Biginne ichil for her loue,
> Bi Jesus leue þat sitt aboue,
> On Inglische tel mi tale.
>
> *Arthour and Merlin*, 21–29
> (Early 14th century).

Literally rendered in modern English, this is: —

> Right is that he English understand
> Who was born in England.
> French use these gentlemen;
> But every Englishman English knows.
> Many a noble have I seen
> Who no French could say.
> Begin I will for their love,
> By Jesus' leave, who sits above,
> In English to tell my tale.

endings, so that finally modern English, when we set it beside modern German, which grew from the same stock, seems to have hardly any inflections at all.

The second cause for change in the language was that Frenchmen, in learning to speak English, as they did more and more every decade, naturally introduced a great many French words. This always happens in like cases. In attempting to speak French, when one is at a loss for a French word he puts an English one into the French sentence. And in England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when a French lord had to converse with his English tenants without any dictionary by to help him, this was done, of course, much more widely. Meantime Englishmen were borrowing from French as from a more elegant language. Besides, for many French words there were no English equivalents. In introducing the feudal system and chivalry, for instance, the French introduced such words as *fief*, *vassal*, *homage*, and *chivalry* itself. The new words came in with the new things; and the habit thus begun has continued in English down to our own day. When we imported motor-cars from France, we imported into our language the words *automobile*, *chauffeur*, *mechanician*, and *garage*.

But the sentence habit, the way of putting words together, was changed very little. One of the first things that any one has to learn in a foreign tongue is the habitual order of words, the sentence habit. When he has fairly mastered this, he has a practical command of the language, even though he may know comparatively few words. Now the French sentence habit, the French order of words, is quite different from the English; and this which is true as between modern French and modern English, is more marked as between medieval French and medieval English. Thus it is plain that the Conquest, great as its effect was in bringing into

English French words, had practically no effect toward bringing in French constructions. The new English that arose in the thirteenth century was mixed with French words; but it kept its English syntax or sentence habit. It was still Germanic in its bones. That is why, in spite of the thousands of French and Latin words it took in then and has taken in since, it was after all English, and is English still.

I. EARLIER ENGLISH VERSE-ROMANCES

(a) ROMANCES IMITATING FRENCH TYPES

English verse-romances of the middle age naturally follow French models. Though the old Germanic alliteration (page 23) was never abandoned, and though in the latter part of the fourteenth century it was deliberately revived as a national mode of verse (page 142), still rime had been too firmly established by the French to be ever supplanted. The early English romances *Horn* and *Havelok* are in short rimed couplets, which give much the same simple metrical effect as the common meter of the French verse-romances. Almost every English romance, moreover, has a known French original. So far, English romance is imitative.

(1) *Sir Bevis of Hampton (about 1300)* [1]

Sometimes the imitation of French models was of that mechanical sort which in the middle ages produced many romances of conventional pattern. The English *Sir Bevis*, for instance, though a few of its many scenes are laid in Eng-

[1] Edited by E. Kölbing for the Early English Text Society, London, 1885; translated into prose in *Three Middle English Romances* (King Horn, Havelok, Beves of Hampton) by Laura A. Hibbard (London, 1911).

land, has very little English character. Rather it is the typical, conventional romance of the middle age, belonging to every country in general and no country in particular, and consisting of a collection of adventures about a famous name. The story is known in four French versions and six Italian, besides Scandinavian, Dutch, and Celtic.

Sir Bevis of Hampton, in his boyhood banished among the Saracens by his wicked mother, grew in renown, won victory for the Saracen King Ermin, and the love of the King's daughter Josian. Josian embracing Christianity for his sake, Bevis was treacherously imprisoned and Josian forced to wed King Ivor of Mombraunt. Escaping after seven years, and finding Josian wedded in name only, Bevis carried her off. After various adventures they went to Cologne, where Bevis slew a dragon, and whence he made an expedition to recover his English inheritance. Meantime Josian, once more forced to marry, strangled the offender and was condemned to be burnt. Bevis arrived from England in time to save her, and took her back to his domain. Thence they returned to the East, where they assured domain for their two sons. Their English lands being threatened, they returned to defend these. In settlement, a daughter of the King of England was married to one of their sons. They went once more to the East, and died in each other's arms.

This is the old, old story of exile and return, of the long-lost heir who comes at last to his own. As told in this romance of 4600 lines, it has twenty-five characters that play a distinct part, and as many more characters, or groups of characters, whose action is subordinate. There are nine separate places of action, with rapid shifting back and forth, from England to Ermonie, to Damascus, to Jerusalem, to Mombraunt, to Cologne, to England, to Cologne again, to England, to Ermonie, and so on. So bewildering is the succession of persons and places that it is hard to keep the names in mind

even while one reads. Beginning with Bevis's father, the romance proceeds chronologically by adding adventure to adventure until Bevis's sons are grown men. Its whole object is to accumulate adventures. Where so much material is crowded into a single story, it is hard to give any part of it detail enough to kindle the reader's imagination and feeling. At the beginning, indeed, one's interest is held by the boy's breaking in on his wicked mother's second bridal like a rude child-Hamlet. This situation may have been the original English story of Bevis. However that may be, from the time when the boy is sold, like Joseph, to heartless merchants, events follow so thick and fast that the modern reader is soon weary.

And the English *Sir Bevis* has little compensating grace of chivalry. The hero's fame is supported mainly by brute strength. Of courtesy he shows very little, even to Josian, his lady. Otherwise he is a stock hero of romance. Like the greater heroes, he has a marvellous horse Arondel, and a marvellous sword Morgelay. There is no lack of giants and dragons; and the oriental setting, though it is nowhere very specific, ranges this tale with the many other medieval romances derived from the East. Love, though it has little space, is very distinct as a motive, both in the guilty passion of Bevis's mother and in the patient devotion of Josian. In both cases the woman is the wooer. And finally the unreality of the average medieval romance is never relieved. Sir Bevis and his Saracens slay sixty thousand men (line 1018). Attacked in a castle, instead of keeping the advantage of position, he leads his men out, previously warning the enemy by trumpet (line 3365). The lady of Aumbeforce, wishing to marry Bevis, and learning that he has a wife, suggests that he be her husband nominally for seven years. If within that time Josian should be found, the lady would

marry Bevis's lieutenant (line 3837). Presented in this crude fashion, the ways of romance seem to our time feeble and silly. Though the best romances do not present them so, *Bevis* shows all the more clearly the romancer's stock in trade.

(2) *Guy of Warwick*[1] (*Probably before 1325*)

The English romance of *Guy of Warwick* is essentially of the same sort. It differs from *Bevis* mainly in being better.

Guy, son of the steward of the Earl of Warwick, fell in love with the earl's daughter Felice. Rejected by her, first until he should be a knight, then until he should have proved himself, and again until he should be the most famous knight of the world, he fought many battles in France, Germany, Italy, and Greece. When he had thus won both the greatest fame and his lady, he was suddenly smitten with remorse for the waste of his life. Forsaking his wife, his domain, and even his country, he spent the rest of his life as a pilgrim. Though he still fought, it was only as a deliverer. In his old age he freed England from the Danes by defeating the giant Colbrand in single combat. Warned of his end, he summoned Felice to his hermitage, kissed her once, and died. She survived him but a fortnight.

For all its twelve thousand lines, this is less tedious and confusing than *Bevis*. Through most of the story the incidents are less crowded. Each situation being told more fully, there is less change of scene. Characterization there is not. All the men are merely knights, brave or cowardly, true or false, but otherwise alike. Yet Guy is preëminent among them not merely, like Bevis, by his strength and daring, but by his courtesy and fine feeling. The romance is truer

[1] Edited by J. Zupitza for the Early English Text Society (London, 1883, 1887, 1891).

to the spirit of chivalry in giving space to the tenderness and devotion of love and to the sensitive honor of knighthood. Conventional though it is, it shows both finer feeling and finer art.

(b) ROMANCES KEEPING ENGLISH EPIC TRADITIONS

Bevis and *Guy* are mere imitations. They show merely how the current fashions were adopted in English. Though in earlier forms they may well have been English legends, as they have come down to us they keep hardly anything English but a few proper names. But medieval English romance can show something far better than mere romantic stock in trade. It has some stories that compel attention both by the vigor of the telling and by the strong English flavor. And these romances are among the earliest. Among the first romances made by Englishmen in English were certain stories of their own race. Though these stories had already been told in French, the English versions, alike in what they pass over and in what they expand, show English epic traditions. Moreover the Arthurian stories were not told in English until late in the fourteenth century, and then with a coloring of epic. In a word, English medieval romancers turned less to pure romance of adventure and more to epic legend (page 75). Pure romance had been well developed on English soil, but in the French tongue. When English literature came to its own again, it showed a much stronger recollection of old epic traditions than obtained in French literature. Romantic the English literature of the later middle age is certainly; but as a whole it is less purely romantic; it breaks less with its past.

(1) *King Horn* [1] (*about 1250*)

Alle be he bliþe
þat to my songe lyþe.
A song ich schall ȝou singe
Of Murry þe Kinge.
King he was biweste,
So longe so hit laste.
Godhild het his quen.
Fairer ne miȝte non ben.
He hadde a son þat het Horn.
Fairer ne miȝte non beo born.[2]

So rude and simple is the earliest English romance. The short verse has somewhat the effect of the usual French short verse; but the rime is often bungled and the rhythm often rough. As poetry it has little worth; but as a story its 1570 lines are lively and interesting.

[1] Edited by J. R. Lumby for the Early English Text Society (London, 1866, re-edited by G. H. McKnight, 1901); reprinted by R. Morris in *Specimens of Early English*, I, 237, edited by J. Hall (Oxford, 1901, Clarendon Press); translated into prose in *Three Middle English Romances* (King Horn, Havelok, Beves of Hampton) by Laura A. Hibbard (London, 1911).

[2] The final *e* is sounded as a separate syllable; and in other respects the old rimes cannot be reproduced. With these allowances, the modern equivalent is:

Be they all blithe
That to my song listen.
A song I shall you sing
Of Murry the King.
King he was to westward
As long as his kingdom lasted.
Godhild hight his queen;
Fairer might none be.
They had a son that hight Horn;
Fairer could none be born.

Blithe be all that listen to my song! Murry, King of Suddene, and his fair queen Godhild had a fair son named Horn. He was bright as the glass, white as a flower, with cheeks red as roses. Twelve companions he had, all fair and noble; but most he loved two, Athulf and Fikenild. One day, as King Murry rode by the strand, the paynims arrived in fifteen ships, killed the king, destroyed churches, and spared none who would not forsake Christ's law. Queen Godhild fled to a cave, where in solitude she served God and prayed for her son. The paynim chief, struck by Horn's great beauty and yet unwilling to risk his growing up to avenge his father, set him adrift with his twelve comrades in a ship. After a day and a night on the deep, the ship beached upon the shore of Westerness. Ailmar, King of that land, took Horn as his foster-child and bade his steward Athelbrus teach him the lore of wood and river, of harping, and of serving as a squire in hall. Horn was beloved by all, but most by the King's daughter Rimenhild. When she could no longer abide, she sent for Horn to her bower. Athelbrus, fearing the King, tried in vain to put her off. "Horn," said she, when at last the hero came, "have me to wife, and plight me thy troth." "Nay," said Horn. "I am born too low. Help me first to knighthood at the King's hand." When this was done, and Horn in turn had knighted his twelve fellows, he rode on a white steed to Rimenhild. "Let me now prove my knighthood," he said; and Rimenhild gave him a magic ring. "The stones are of such grace," she told him, "that if thou look thereon and think of me, thou shalt fear no strokes." Forthwith Horn rode out on a coal-black steed, slew a band of paynim marauders, and brought their leader's head to King Ailmar. But the traitor Fikenild, declaring that Horn meant to kill the king and reign as Rimenhild's husband, as a proof showed the lovers together in secret. Now Rimenhild had dreamed that she caught in her net a great fish, who thereupon broke the net and escaped. "This is thy dream," said Horn, when the King in wrath had banished him. "I am the fish that broke from thy net. For now I must away to unknown lands. If in seven years I return not to claim thee, thou mayst wed another. Take me now in thine arms and kiss me long."

Then, when Rimenhild swooned in his arms, he committed her to Athulf, rode to the sea, and took ship to Ireland. There, under the name of Cutberd, he rid the country of paynims and won the same honor and love as in Westerness. Indeed, King Thurston offered his daughter Reynild in marriage; but Horn declared he must serve seven years. When the seven years were almost over, a messenger from Rimenhild brought word that she was to be wed in her despite to King Modi of Reynes. "Bid her mourn no longer," cried Horn; "for I shall be there betimes." Then telling King Thurston his whole story, he asked and obtained a band of Irishmen. Arrived in Westerness, he left his men in a wood by the shore and went to the wedding feast disguised as a palmer. The faithful Athulf was scanning the sea from a tower, and singing "Horn, thou art long. Rimenhild, whom thou gavest to my care, I have kept till now. Come now or never. I cannot keep her longer." Now as Rimenhild bore the cup to the palmer on the beggar's bench, Horn dropped into it the ring. "No beggar am I," said he, "but a fisher come from far eastward to fish at thy feast. My net hath lain on the strand full seven years." And when a maiden brought him to her bower, he told her Horn had died on the voyage to Westerness. "Break now my heart," cried Rimenhild, and reached for the knife that she had hidden to slay herself with and King Modi, if it came to that. But Horn threw off his disguise, wiped the black from his face, and took her in his arms. With his Irish followers and Athulf he overcame all resistance and married Rimenhild. Then said Horn to King Ailmar, "Rimenhild shall be a king's wife; for I will recover my father's kingdom of Suddene." So with Athulf and his Irish fellows, he sailed off once more, won his native land, and brought his mother from the wild wood. Meantime the traitor Fikenild had Rimenhild away by his power to a strong castle surrounded by the sea. But Horn, seeing in a dream his love shipwrecked and beaten from the shore by Fikenild, cried "Athulf! to ship!" and before sunrise was under Fikenild's tower with his band. Disguised as harpers, they made their way in, killed Fikenild, and brought all his pains to an end. For Rimenhild he took back as his queen to Suddene, Athelbrus he made

king of Modi's realm, and Athulf he wedded to King Thurston's daughter Reynild.

Here endeth the tale of Horn,
That fair was and nothing worn.
Let us be the gladder ever among;
For thus is ended Horn's song.
Jesus that is of heaven King
Give us all his sweet blessing. *Amen.*

A minstrel-song this may well have been. Certainly it is that old story of exile and return which has been repeated in many forms through many centuries. Its furnishing is romantic. The ship that brought the twelve to land, the love of the princess, the magic ring, the arrival in the nick of time, — all these are marvels of romance. But the interest of the story is no more in them than in such human courage as underlies epic. The love of Horn and Rimenhild, though strongly suggested, is not dwelt upon. The magic ring is used only as a memento and inspiration. "He looked on the ring and thought on Rimenhild." It does not do Horn's fighting for him. And Horn's self-control in putting love aside for honor is more distinctly characterized than is usual in romance (page 65).

In all this the English version may keep the epic tradition of some lost Norse Saga of Horn. But the companion French romance, *Horn et Rimenhild*, shows no such character. Drawn in the preceding century from the same source as the English version, it is five times as long and every way more courtly and elaborate. The English romancer, though he wrote later, gave a far more primitive version.

(2) *Havelok the Dane*[1] (*about 1300*)

Havelok the Dane, a stronger romance of the same period on the same general theme of exile and return, is even more strongly epic.

The story may have been told originally as a Norse saga of Olaf, or Anlaf, Sihtricson (see page 52); one of its early versions was probably Welsh, and it is still called a *lay;* but, whatever was the original, the English *Lay of Havelok the Dane* (3000 lines) is not a paraphrase from the French *Lai d'Havelok* (1106 lines). The French tells the tale briefly and without much modification of the conventional romantic manner; the English, keeping the framework of romance and the interest of adventure and love, expands the tale by vivid descriptions. The persons of the French romance are all gentle-folk very much alike; the persons of the English romance are strongly marked men and women, some of them rude common people, and all standing out very clearly because of the abundance of concrete descriptive detail, as is the way of epic. The true prince, treacherously put out of the way, lives to come into his own — that is the old story; and with it is woven a parallel story of a wronged princess.

Athelwold, King of England, at his death left his little daughter Goldeboro, his only child, in the care of Earl Goodrich, after taking oaths from him and all the other barons to seat her on the throne when she came of age. But Goodrich used his control toward establishing his own son. Meantime Birkabeyn, King of Denmark, lodged a like trust at his death in his favorite Earl Godard; and even more outrageously Godard abused it. For he cut the throats

[1] *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, re-edited by W. W. Skeat (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1902); translated into prose in *Three Middle English Romances* (King Horn, Havelok, Bevis of Hampton) by Laura A. Hibbard (London, 1911).

of both the little princesses and gave the boy Havelok to be drowned by a fisherman named Grim. When Grim came to the foul work at night, lo! a light shone from the boy's mouth, and on his shoulder was uncovered the royal kinmark. Then Grim, taking Havelok with all his own family, fled to England and established himself on the coast of Lincolnshire, where is a town called Grimsby to this day. The boy grew up among his foster-brothers and sisters, ignorant of his origin, big and strong, a huge eater. When famine pressed as he came to manhood, he went into the city of Lincoln to seek his fortune, and by his huge strength won a position as porter to Earl Goodrich's cook. Soon he became renowned as the tallest and strongest man of that country. The princess Goldeboro, who had been kept under close guard, was now of age and of great beauty. To do her shame and put her out of the way of his son's advancement, Earl Goodrich forced her to marry Havelok. "I promised," he said derisively, "to give her to the highest man, the fairest, the strongest. Where shall I find a man higher, fairer, or stronger than this churl's son in my kitchen?" At night Goldeboro knew by the light from Havelok's mouth and by the red cross on his shoulder that he was of high lineage. With her and with Grim's sons Robert the Red, William Wendout, and Hugh Raven, Havelok sailed to Denmark, gained the favor of Earl Ubbe, overthrew Godard, and won his father's kingdom. Then leading his Danish army into England, he vindicated Goldeboro's right in a great battle against Earl Goodrich, and made himself King of England also.

Now have ye heard the gest all through
Of Havelok and of Goldeboro:
How they were born and how fed,
And how they were with wrong led
In their youth with treachery,
With treason and with felony;
And how the villains had by might
Reft them that which was their right;
And how they got revenge most fit,
Have I told you every whit.

All these events are in the French *Lai d'Havelok*, but none of the English distinctness and picturesqueness.

Herkneth to me, gode [1] men,
Wives, maydnes, and alle men,
Of a tale ich you wil telle,
Hwo-so it wile here, and therto duelle.
The tale of Havelok is i-maked.
Hwil he was litel he yede [2] ful naked. (1–6.)

No translation is necessary to show that these opening lines, though somewhat rude, are far more regular and effective as verse then *King Horn*. Sometimes, indeed, *The Lay of Havelok* approaches poetic quality.

It was a king bi are [3] dawes
That in his time were gode lawes [4]
He dide maken and ful wel holde.
Him lovede yung, him loveden olde,
Erl and barun, dreng and thayn,
Kniht and bondeman and swain. (27–32.)

But its force is mainly in the epic fulness of detail which makes us realize every situation by specific images. Grim, once settled in his English home, throve as a fisherman. The poem tells us, as the *Iliad* or the *Beowulf* would tell, just what fish he caught — sturgeon, turbot, salmon, cod, mackerel, and so on.

Gode paniers dide he make
On til him, and other thrinne [5]
Til hise sones, to bere fish inne,
Up o-londe [6] to sell and fonge [7]
Forbar he neyther tun [8] ne gronge,

[1] *-e* and *-es* are sounded as separate syllables.
[2] went. [3] former. [4] laws. [5] three. [6] inland.
[7] take. [8] farmstead nor grange.

That he ne [1] to-yede with his ware.
Cam he nevere hom hand-bare,[2]
That he ne brouhte [3] bred and sowl [4]
In his shirte or in his cowl,
In his poke [5] benes and corn. (760–769.)

It is in such homely details of real life that the poem is most rich. "I eat more," cries the shame-faced lad Havelok, "than Grim and his children five. It may not be thus long." So, after helping Grim mightily by carrying huge panniers of fish, he resolves, in a time of scarcity, to seek his fortune in Lincoln. "But woe is me!" says Grim, "thou art so naked!"

Of mi sayl I wolde were maked
A cloth thou mihtest inne gonge,[6]
Sone, no cold that thou ne fonge.[7]
He took the sheres of [8] the nayl,
And made him a cowl of the sayl,
And Havelok dide it sone on.
Hadde he neyther hosen ne shon.[9] (853–860.)

So Havelok went to Lincoln; and so we can see him go. In his eagerness to get work as a porter, he toppled a whole row of his competitors over into the fen. He put the stone twelve feet beyond the best champion. Strong and fair, he was also pure. "Of body was he maiden clean." To save his unwilling wife from further persecution, the great simple-heart takes her back to Grimsby. Grim is dead; but his children receive them with loud joy and promise of service.

Thou shalt ben loverd,[10] thou shalt ben syre,
And we sholen [11] serven the [12] and hire; [13]

[1] that he did not go with his wares.
[2] empty-handed. [3] without bringing. [4] relish.
[5] bag. [6] go. [7] take. [8] off. [9] stockings nor shoes.
[10] lord. [11] shall. [12] thee. [13] her.

And ure [1] sistres sholen do
Al that evere biddes sho.[2]
He [3] sholen hire clothes washen and wringen,
And to handes water bringen. (1229–1234.)

But Goldeboro, so soon as she knows Havelok's rank, urges him to win his Danish Kingdom. Every scene of their expedition has the epic definiteness of detail. Marvelling at Havelok's stature and at Goldeboro's beauty, Earl Ubbe had them to a feast, which is described in detail, and set a guard about their house under his faithful Bernard Brown. Nevertheless sixty men attacked the house at night.

Bernard stirt [4] up, that was ful big,
And caste a brinie [5] upon his rig,[6]
And grop an ax, that was ful god,
Lep to the dore, so [7] he were wod.[8] (1774–1777.)

The outlaws broke in the door with a "boulder-stone."

Havelok it saw, and thider drof,[9]
And the barre sone ut-drow,[10]
That was unride [11] and gret ynow,[12]
And caste the dore open wide,
And seide, "Her shal I now abide;
Comes [13] swithe unto me."

. . . . . .

Havelok lifte up the dore-tree
And at a dint he slow [14] hem three.
Was non of hem that hise hernes [15]

[1] our.
[2] she.
[3] they.
[4] started.
[5] coat of mail, byrnie.
[6] back.
[7] as if.
[8] mad.
[9] drove, ran.
[10] drew out.
[11] unwieldy.
[12] enough.
[13] Come right on to me.
[14] slew.
[15] brains.

Ne lay ther-ute again the sternes.[1]
The ferthe [2] that he sithen [3] mette
With the barre so he him grette [4]
Bifor the heved [5] that the riht eye
Ut of the hole made he fleye,
And sithen clapte him on the crune [6]
So that he stan-ded [7] fel ther dune [8]

. . . . . .

Sum smot with tre and sum with ston;
Sum putten with gleyve [9] in bac and side
And yeven [10] wundes longe and wide
In twenti stedes,[11] and wel mo [12]
Fro the croune til the to.
Hwan he saw that, he was wod,
And it was ferlik [13] hu [14] he stod;
For the blod ran of his sides
So water that fro the welle glides.
But thanne bigan he for to mowe
With the barre. (1793–1853.)

Evidently the poet loved this fight. The idea of the hero defending the doorway against odds warmed his imagination to picture every detail — the big bar, the sturdy challenge, the manner of each great stroke. It is an epic situation, and epically he has described it. For here flashes out of the romance the old epic conception of the hero, not a gentleman keeping the chivalrous code of battle, but a primitive strong man, king though he be, smiting his enemies with a door-bar. As if to complete the epic character of the scene, Hugh Raven, hearing the din, rushes up crying:

[1] stars.
[2] fourth.
[3] then.
[4] greeted.
[5] head.
[6] crown.
[7] stone-dead.
[8] down.
[9] sword.
[10] gave.
[11] places.
[12] more.
[13] wondrous.
[14] how.

Roberd! William! hware are ye?
Gripeth [1] eyther unker a god tre,
And late we nouht thise dogges fle
Til ure loverd wreke be.
Cometh swithe, and folwes me! (1881–1885.)

This is what the English poet felt and, feeling, has made us feel. As for love, not only is there none of the French dwelling on tender passages, but there is no love-making at all. At the end of the tale all the principal characters are disposed in marriage. For the rest, the poet has this to say of Havelok and Goldeboro, after their battles were over:

So mikel love was hem bitwene
That al the world spak of hem [2] two.
He lovede hire and she him so
That neyther other mihte be
Fro other, ne [3] no joie se,
But yf [4] he [5] were to-gidere bothe.
Nevere yete ne [3] weren he [5] wrothe.
For here [6] love was ay newe;
Nevere yete wordes ne [3] grewe
Bitwene hem, hwar-of no lathe [7]
Mihte rise, ne no wrathe. (2967–2977.)

Love before marriage the poet can dispense with altogether; love after marriage he dismisess with general, perfunctory praise; but his real interest, and consequently his real force, is in action. *Havelok the Dane*, though its incidents are romantic, is in interest largely epic. In wider

[1] Grip each of you a good tree,
And suffer we not these dogs to flee
Till our lord avenged be.
Come forthwith and follow me.

[2] them. [4] unless. [6] their.
[3] not, nor. [5] they. [7] harme.

compass it exhibits some of those qualities which make the best English ballads (page 231).

2. LATER ENGLISH ARTHURIAN VERSE-ROMANCES

(a) CONVENTIONAL VERSIONS

English verse-romances of the Charlemagne cycle [1] have not sufficiently distinctive treatment to demand separate discussion. Even the Arthur stories, which often called forth such further development of English literary traits as will be explained later, were in some cases handled quite conventionally.

(1) *Arthur and Merlin* [2] *(early Fourteenth Century)*

This romance tells of the coming of Arthur to his kingdom by the aid of the fiend-begotten Merlin. Its ten thousand lines show no more English character than *Bevis* (page 113). There is the same mechanical accumulation of incidents, the same multitude of characters, too many to be presented clearly, or even remembered by name, the same spreading of the story over three generations, — in short, the same following of a foreign original without artistic shaping. As a story it becomes tiresome by the recurrence of incidents indistinguishably similar and by its general lack of focus; and as verse it is crude and monotonous. Often in his constant description of fighting the romancer hits on a strong, homely phrase. Beyond that the only relief is in those passages where he pauses between episodes to describe the season with a touch of half-lyric feeling.

[1] The principal of these for this period are *Roland and Vernagu* and *Otuel*, of the earlier part of the fourteenth century; *Sir Firumbras*, *The Sege of Melayne*, and the *Song of Roland*, of the latter part.

[2] Edited from the Auchinleck Ms. by Kölbing (Altenglische Bibliothek, Leipzig, 1890).

Mirie time is Auerille.
Þan scheweth michel of our wille.
In feld and mede floures springeþ,
In grene wode foules singeþ.
Ȝong man wereþ jolif
& þan proudeþ man & wiif.[1]

Arthour and Merlin, 259–264.

And again:

Mirie time it is in May.
Þan wexeþ along the day,
Floures schewen her borioun.
Miri it is in feld & toun.
Foules miri in wode gredeþ.
Damisels carols ledeþ.[2] (1709–1714.)

But these ten charming interludes are not original with the Englishman. Indeed, they are doubtless conventional.

(2) *Libeaus Desconus*[3] (*1325–1350?*)

To the old story of the fair unknown this short romance adds the equally old story of the awakening kiss. Gingelain, unrecognized son of Gawain,

[1] Merry is the April season;
Then impulse will not wait for reason.
In field and meadow flowers are springing;
Throughout the greenwood birds are singing.
Youth's joy is not denied;
Man and woman don their pride.

[2] Merry time it is in May;
Then longer waxes the day.
Flower bourgeons unfold their charm;
Merry it is in field and farm.
Merry birds in the wood are crying,
Damosels in carols vying.

[3] i.e., *Le Bel Inconnu* (The Fair Unknown); edited by Kaluza (in Kölbing's Altenglische Bibliothek, Leipzig, 1890). For a rendering into

Gingelein was fair of siȝt,
Gentill of body, of face briȝt,
All bastard ȝef [1] he were.
His modir him kepte wiþ her miȝt,
Þat he scholde se no kniȝt
Y-armed in no manere;
For he was full savage
And gladly wolde do outrage
To his felawes in fere.[2]
And all for doute of wikked loos [3]
His modir kepte him in clos [4]
As douȝty child and dere.

Libeaus Desconus, stanza 2.

This opening situation, which is identical with that of *Sir Perceval of Galles* (page 135), is merely summarized, without any such detail as makes *Sir Perceval* vivid. The main narrative, of Gingelain's following a damsel to deliver her mistress, tells briefly the same story as Malory's seventh book and Tennyson's *Gareth and Lynette*. The romance closes with the entirely separate story of freeing a maid from enchantment. There is no artistic shaping of the story as a whole; and there is little distinctive character in the parts. Though there is an English lack of love-making, there is none of the English dwelling upon nature.

In þe grene greves [5]
Þey diȝte [6] a logge [7] of leves
Wiþ swordes briȝt and broune. (595–597.)

modern English prose, see Jessie L. Weston, *Sir Cleges and Sir Libeaus Desconus*, London, 1902, in the series entitled *Arthurian Romances Unrepresented in Malory's "Morte d'Arthur,"* 5.

[1] if. [2] company. [3] loss.
[4] confinement, check; i.e., kept him close.
[5] groves. [6] made. [7] lodge.

Such glances at nature are not only very rare and very brief; they are also entirely conventional. It shows neither observation nor feeling to call groves green and swords bright. Indeed, the romancer never gives specific detail to anything except fighting and the dress and trappings of his vague personages. *Libeaus Desconus*, as a story, is utterly conventional. It has no English character.

But as verse it deserves a little more attention. Instead of short rhymed couplets, it has verse-groups, or stanzas, of twelve verses. The couplets are separated by shorter verses riming together on a different rime; and the second couplet has the same rime as the first. Indicating the stresses by numbers and the rimes by letters, we may formulate the stanza thus:

4a 4a 3b, 4a 4a 3b, 4c 4c 3b, 4d 4d 3b.

But through most of the poem all the verses have the same number of stresses, thus:

3a 3a 3b, 3a 3a 3b, 3c 3c 3b, 3d 3d 3b.

Even so, the romancer escapes the monotony of the couplet, and shows that Englishmen were developing skill in verse.

(b) Versions Showing English Development

Some of the medieval English Arthur stories keep the earlier tendency to dwell on fighting rather than on loving. The glamour of the Celtic fairyland which gave these stories birth, and the courtliness of chivalry in which they had been dressed by the French, generally appealed less to the English poets. And beside these negative traits we may discern certain positive English characteristics that persist in our literature.

(1) *Sir Tristrem* [1] (*about 1300*)

Tristram (page 62), huntsman, harper, lover of the fair Iseult, is in this north-English romance a ruder figure, the nearer perhaps to the simplicity of the original Celtic folk-tale, but the further from the French courtly lover. The English Tristram, like the English Percival (page 135), is more Germanic, a wild, strong youth, a fighting man. And the manner of telling the story is rapid, sometimes too abrupt for clearness, never elaborate. Perhaps this story was oral. At any rate, the English poet has compressed the romance within a little over three thousand short lines. His conciseness, however, is not the artistic selection of a few incidents for presentation in detail. It is not the artistic conciseness of the finished French and Latin short romances (page 95), or of the later English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (page 154), but simply the telling of all the incidents more briefly. The narrative art, though stronger than that of *Libeaus Desconus* (page 131), goes little further than direct, summary phrase in description and the omission of explanatory transitions.

But again there is more art in the verse. The eleven-verse stanza has, first, eight three-stress verses riming alternately, then a single-stress verse on a third rime, and finally two three-stress verses on the second and third rimes respectively; thus:

3a 3b, 3a 3b, 3a 3b, 3a 3b, 1c, 3b, 3c.

[1] Edited by G. P. McNeill for the Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh and London, 1886. Bédier's compilation of the Tristram stories, *Le roman de Tristan et Iseut*, has been translated into English by Florence Simmonds, London, 1910. For the development of the Tristram story in English see Schofield's *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, pages 201–214.

A forest fled thai tille,
Tristrem and ysoude þe schene.
No hadde þai no won to wille
But þe wode so grene.
Bi holtes and bi hille
Fore tristram and þe quene.
Ysoude of ioie haþ her fille.
And tristram wiþouten wene.
As þare,
So bliþe al bi dene
Nar þai neuer are.[1]
Sir Tristrem, 2454–2464.

This stanza exemplifies another trait of English verse-romance, its occasional expression of the poet's feeling for nature. English lyric verse (page 170) in this period is not often awakened by love of a lady; but is is stirred now and then by love of wood or meadow. In *Sir Tristrem*, though the two are combined, the poet makes us feel less distinctly the joy of loving than the joy of living out of doors. Tristram and Iseult live in an earth house, wrought in old days by giants, and approached by a secret path. Summer's heat and winter's cold they bear together. Without wine or ale or dainty food, they live on wild flesh and herbs (2477–2505).

[1] The stanza may be imitated thus: —
They fled to forest hiding
Far from hall and tower.
Naught had they for their abiding
But the greenwood bower.
By holt and hillside guiding
Went Tristram. Every hour
Yseult in him confiding
Felt all her joy in flower.
Of pleasure,
Beyond all jealous power,
Had they brimming measure.

It is a foretaste of the poetry which flowered in Shakespeare's "Under the greenwood tree."

(2) *Sir Perceval of Galles* (*not later than 1350* [1])

All these English developments — epic handling, stanza, love of nature rather than love of woman, are marked in *Sir Perceval of Galles* (see page 67). Here the old story of exile and return keeps its primitive character. The English Percival, brought up by his mother in the wildwood, is almost as much the fair, strong barbarian as the Norse Sigurd. There is little care for courtesies; there is hardly a detail of love-making, in spite of the fact that love is the main motive of the original; there is no trace of the Grail legend which made later versions of the Percival story mystical. This Percival is a thoroughly real epic hero, rejoicing in fight, simply humorous, closely akin in conception to Havelok. In form the romance is like *Sir Tristrem*, summary in much the same manner, but with rather more skill in planning and with far more direct and vigorous phrase. Brimful of action, it never pauses in its swift course, and suddenly closes at line 2288. Like its hero, the tale is strong and simple. The stanza has sixteen verses on five rimes:

aaab, cccb, dddb, eeeb.

Thus he welke [2] in the lande
With hys darte in his hande.
Under the wild wodde wande [3]
He wexe [4] and wele thrave.[5]
He wolde schote with his spere
Bestes and other gere,

[1] See note to page 67.
[2] walked. [3] bough. [4] waxed, grew. [5] throve.

As many als [1] he myghte bere.
He was a gude knave.[2]
Small birdes wolde he slo [3]
Hertys, hyndez [4] also,
Broghte his moder of tho; [5]
Thurte hir [6] none crave.
So wele he lernede hym to schote,
Ther was no beste that welke [7] on fote,
To flee fro hym was it no bote,[8]
Whenne that he wolde hym have.

(3) *Le Morte Arthur* [9] (*late Fourteenth Century*)

The three preceding stories, originally quite separate from those of Arthur, were merely included in the Arthur cycle later, never brought into any vital connection. Even in Malory's great fifteenth-century prose version (page 161) the Tristram books can be omitted without at all disturbing the narrative; the story of the fair unknown (Gareth) is still connected only by the hero's kinship with Arthur; and the Percival story is brought in, shorn of its early distinctive character, only in connection with the general quest of the Holy Grail. But as *Arthour and Merlin* (page 129) gives us, in an earlier form, the first part of the Arthur story proper, so *Le Morte Arthur* gives us the tragic latter part substantially as we all know it.

[1] as.
[2] lad.
[3] slay.
[4] harts, hinds.
[5] those.
[6] No need for her to crave any.
[7] walked.
[8] good, avail.

[9] Re-edited for the Early English Text Society (Extra Series, 88) by Bruce, London, 1903; reprinted, with an introduction by Lucy A. Paton, in Everyman's Library, 634 (London and New York, 1912); re-edited by S. B. Hemingway (Boston, 1912, Riverside Literature Series).

The knightis of the table Round,
The sangrayle [1] whan they had sought,
Aunturs [2] that they byfore them found
Fynisshid and to ende brought.
Their enemyes they bette [3] & bound;
For gold on lyff [4] they lefte them noght.
Foure yere they lyved sound,
Whan they had these werkis wroght.

Le Morte Arthur, second stanza.

The verse is crude. The stanza is a simple alternation of rimes, and rarely rises much higher than in this passage above doggerel. But the presentment of characters shows more force. Instead of being all alike, the heroes stand out with some distinctness. "Nice clerk," cries Mordred to the reproving Archbishop of Canterbury, "trowest thou to hinder me of my will?" (3010.) The fair Elaine, purest figure of the Arthurian stories, is nowhere presented more distinctly in her sweet simplicity than here.

Therle had a doughter that was hym dere;
Mykell [5] Launcelott she beheld.
Hir rode [6] was rede as blossom on brere,[7]
Or floure that springith in the feld.
Glad she was to sitte hym nere,
The noble knight undir sheld.
Wepinge was hyr moste chere [8]
So mykell [5] on hym hyr herte gan held.[9]

Up than rose that mayden stille
And to hyr chamber wente she tho.[10]
Downe uppon hir bedde she felle,
That nighe hyr herte brast [11] in two. (177–188.)

[1] Holy Grail. [2] adventures. [3] beat. [4] alive. [5] much. [6] blush. [7] briar. [8] her most frequent cheer or look. [9] incline. [10] then. [11] burst.

And when Lancelot will go away, —

Sir, if that your willis were,
Sithe[1] I of the ne[2] may have mare,[3]
Som thinge ye wolde beleve[4] me here,
To loke on whan me longith sare.[5] (556–559.)

In construction, too, in the shaping of the tale, there is far better proportion than in *Arthour and Merlin* (page 129). The story is told more clearly, more directly, and with some effort to focus the reader's attention on the tragic outcome of the whole. In details the romancer shows a manner traditionally popular. Dialogue often begins abruptly, without any explanatory transition:

Launcelott forth wendys[6] he
Unto the chambyr to the quene,
And sette hym downe upon his kne
And salues[7] there that lady shene.[8]
"Launcelott, what dostow[9] here with me?" (65–69.)

Again, one stanza is often linked to another by repetition of a verse as a sort of refrain, — a habit seen also in *Sir Perceval*. When the broken Guenevere, turned nun, bids Launcelot leave her forever and take to himself a wife, he indignantly refuses, declaring that he too will enter a monastery and pray for her always. "Wilt thou so?" cries the queen:

Lancelot sayd, "If I sayd nay,
I were wele worthy to be brent.[10]

And the next stanza begins:

Brent to be bene worthy I were,
If I wold take non suche a lyffe." (3696–3699.)

[1] since. [2] not. [3] more [4] leave [5] sore. [6] wends. [7] salutes. [8] fair. [9] dost thou. [10] burnt.

Sometimes a whole stanza is repeated with similar slight variation. The lyric called *Pearl* (page 173) uses refrain with more consistency and art. The simpler use of *Le Morte Arthur* has the same homely force as in the story of Isaac and Rebekah told in the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis. Traditional in popular narrative, the abrupt shift to dialogue and this use of refrain go back to the beginnings of literature, and are seen in many popular ballads (page 231). In such details of construction, in the use of traditional descriptions like that "rede as blossom on brere," and in terse, homely phrase, this romance shows that the narrative manner of the folk-tale was kept alive in an age of more conscious art.

Now thou leviste for hyr sake
All thy dede of armys bolde,
I may wofully wepe and wake
In clay till I be clongyn [1] cold. (748–751.)

If such passages as this were preserved as fragments without context, we should guess that they belonged to some ballad. This popular, ballad quality is the distinctive trait of *Le Morte Arthur* among the English Arthurian romances, and marks it as akin to *Havelok*.

(c) THE REVIVAL OF ALLITERATION

In adopting rime from the French, medieval English poets did not abandon alliteration (page 23). At first, keeping alliteration as a principle of their verse, they merely rimed their staves. Layamon in his *Brut*,[2] a romantic, half-

[1] shrivelled.

[2] Both Wace and Layamon are translated into modern English prose by Eugene Mason, *Arthurian Chronicles* (London and New York, 1912, Everyman's Library). Layamon's *Brut* is summarized in Morley's *English Writers*, volume III, page 212.

mythical chronicle drawn early in the thirteenth century from the Norman French of Wace (page 106), rimes his staves but now and then, often quite clumsily:

for norð beoð þa Peohtes,
swiþe ohte cnihtes,
þe ofte ledeð in mine londe
ferde swiðe stronge,
& ofte doð me muchele scome;
& þerfore ich habbe grome.[1] (13951–6.)

Feeble as is this riming — Layamon evidently meant to rime the last two staves, and perhaps the first two — it has already upset the regularity and force of the alliteration. Gradually, from being the principle of verse, alliteration came to be what it is in modern English, merely an additional and incidental adornment. The metrical scheme came to depend on regular rhythm with rime; whether there should also be alliteration was decided by the taste of the individual poet. *Le Morte Arthur* has a great deal:

Bold men with Bowes Bentte
Boldely up in Botes yode,[2]
And Ryche hauberkis they Ryve and Rente,
That throwowte Braste the Rede Blode.
Grounden Gleyves throw hem wente;
Tho Games thoght theym [3] nothynge Gode.
But by that [4] Stronge Stoure [5] was Stente,[6]
The Stronge Stremys ran all on blode.[7] (3074–3081.)

[1] Northward are the Picts,
Very brave knights,
Who often lead into my land
Host very strong,
And oft do me much shame;
And therefore I have vexation.

[2] went. [3] seemed to them. [4] by the time that, when. [5] battle. [6] stinted, stopped. [7] in blood, bloody.

Here the alliteration is both excessive and, according to the old use (page 23), irregular. Irregular also, though more delicate, is the alliteration in *Sir Perceval of Galles* (page 135):

Scho [1] Sende [2] hir Socour fulle gode,
Mary that is Mylde of Mode.[3]
As he come thurgh the wode
A Ferly [4] he Fande; [5]
A Bird Brighteste of Ble [6]
Stode Faste Bondene [7] tille a tre,
I say it yow certainly,
Both fote and hande. (1825–1832.)

Such instances of incidental alliteration are common in the medieval English verse-romances.

(1) *Joseph of Arimathie* [8] (*about 1350*)

But, besides this incidental use, alliteration survived here and there as a verse-principle kept by some English poet who loved the old literary ways of his race. The romance entitled *Joseph of Arimathie*, one of the Grail stories, is entirely alliterative, without rime:

"And Joseph, walk in þe World, and preche myne Wordes
to the Proudest men. A Parti schul þei here.
þauȝ þei þe of Manas Melen and þe þreten,
beo þou Noþing a-Dred; for Non schal þe Derve."
"Lord, I was never Clerk; what and I ne Cunne?"
"Louse þi Lippes atwynne, & Let þe gost worche.[9] (44–49.)

[1] she. [2] sent. [3] mood. [4] marvel. [5] found. [6] color [7] bound.

[8] Edited by W. W. Skeat for the Early English Text Society (London, 1871).

[9] "And, Joseph, Walk in the World and preach my Words
to the Proudest men. A Part shall they hear.
Though they thee with Menace Meddle and thee threaten,
be thou Nowise in Dread; for None shall thee Damage."
"Lord, I was never Clerk; what if I Cannot?"
"Loose thy Lips asunder, and Let the Spirit work."

Though such verse-making was against the tide of the times, it spread during the latter part of the fourteenth century, especially in the North, as a distinct and conscious revival. Nothing could show more strikingly the tenacity of English literary traditions.

(2) *Morte Arthure* (*about 1360*)

The most conspicuous romance of this poetic revival is the strong and thoroughly epic *Morte Arthure*.[1] Out of line with the romantic development of the Arthur stories,[2] in choice of incidents and in treatment, as well as in verse, it is a very English poem.

Arthur, sitting in royal state as conqueror and ruler of Britain, is approached by the envoys of Lucius, Emperor of Rome, who demands tribute. In reply Arthur leads a host to the Continent and utterly defeats the emperor in several battles. But Modred, who has been left as regent, turns traitor, marries Arthur's queen Gaynour, and raises a host. In crushing this rebellion Arthur loses his best knights, including Gawain, and himself dies at Glastonbury.

There is no Merlin, no Holy Grail, no love-motive. Lancelot is barely mentioned. Arthur himself, instead of merely presiding, fights his own battles like the epic kings. His chief knight is Gawain, who here keeps all the glory borrowed from him by other romances for Lancelot. Next in honor

[1] Edited from the Lincoln manuscript by Mary Macleod Banks (London, 1900). There is an earlier edition by E. Brock (London, 1865, Early English Text Society). The poem has been translated into modern prose by Andrew Boyle, with an introduction by Lucy A. Paton (London and New York, 1912, Everyman's Library, 634), and in part by Jessie L. Weston, *Romance, Vision, and Satire* (Boston and New York, 1912, page 137).

[2] It follows the earlier form seen in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniæ* (page 78), in both order and emphasis.

is Cador. Taking his story mainly from the chronicles, this poet disregarded the later versions of the romances.

For he had no wish to be romantic. Out of line in his choice of incidents, he is still more out of line in treatment. He tells his Arthur story, not romantically, but epically. The richness of Arthur's court, the details of armor and fighting, are told specifically, with the same pleasure in them as appears in the *Iliad* or the *Beowulf*. Preparing to fight the giant of St. Michel, Arthur went to his wardrobe and threw off his clothes, armed him in a jacket with rich border, over that donned a jerkin of Acres, and then a jesseraunt of fine mail and a slashed "jupon of Jerodyn." He drew on a helmet of burnished silver, "the best that was in Basil, with borders rich," the crest and the coronal enclosed fairly with clasps of clear gold set with stones (900–909). Again and again the poet lingers over such details. Like the epic poets, he tells us, not only that a man was hit, but just how:

Thane the comlyche Kynge castez in fewtyre;
With a crewell launce cowpez full even
Abowne þe spayre a spanne, emange the schortte rybbys,
That the splent and the spleen on the spere lengez.
The blode sprente owtte and sprede as þe horse spryngez,
And he sproulez full spakely, bot spekes he no more.[1] (2058–2063.)

Through the same specific detail we see the embarking of an English host, as we see the embarking of a Greek host in the *Iliad:*

[1] Then the comely King casts in rest,
With a cruel lance strikes full even
Above the waist a span, among the short ribs,
So that splinter and spleen stay on the spear.
The blood sprang out and spread as the horse springs,
And he sprawls full soon, but speaks he no more.

Qwen all was schyppede that sholde, they schounte no lengere,
Bot ventelde them tyte as þe tyde rynnez.
Cogges and crayers þan crossez þaire mastez,
At the commandment of þe kynge, uncoverde at ones.
Wyghtly on þe wale þay wye up þaire ankers,
By wytt of þe watyre-men of the wale ythez.
Frekes on þe forestayne faken þeire coblez.
In floynes, and fercostez, and Flemesche schyppes,
Tytt saillez to þe toppe, and turnez þe lufe,
Standez appon stere-bourde, sterynly þay songen.[1] (736–745.)

The spirit of this passage is the spirit of the whole poem, a national feeling against foreign arrogance, and a national joy in its overthrow. In its communal feeling, as well as in its specific detail, the poem is epic.

Nor is it less epic in presenting each main figure as a living man speaking and acting according to his own distinct character. Turning his back on the romantic world of indistinguishable figures, the poet presents a real world of real men.

> Than gud Gawayne, gracious and noble,
> All with glorious gle he gladdis his knyghtes:
> "Gloppyns noghte, gud men, for gleterand scheldes,
> ȝof ȝone gadlyngez be gaye on ȝone gret horses.
> Banerettez of Bretayne, buskes up ȝour hertes!

[1] When all was shipped that should be, they shunned no longer,
But spread sail straightway as the tide runs.
Cogs and crayers (large and small transports) cross their masts,
At the command of the King uncovered at once.
Nimbly on the gunwale they weigh up their anchors
By wit of the watermen of the waves of ocean.
Bold lads on the capstan coil their cables,
In floyns and farcoasts (small craft?) and Flemish ships
Haul sails to the top, and turn the tiller,
Stand to starboard; sternly they sang.

Bees noghte baiste of ȝone boyes, ne of þaire bryghte wedis!
We sall blenke theire boste for all theire blode profire.[1] (2851–2857.)

This "glorious glee" marks Gawayn throughout the poem at once as a communal hero and as a real, individual man.

Sir Kay, mortally wounded from behind as he rides in, gives his last stroke and his last word with a dramatic force worthy of Shakespeare's historical plays:

"Keep the, cowarde," and calles hym sone,
Cleves hym with his clere brande clenliche in sondire.
"Hadde thow wele delte thy dynt with thi handes,
I hadde forgeffen þe my dede, be Crist now of hewyn."
He weyndes to þe wyese Kynge, and wynly hym gretes,
"I am wathely woundide, waresche mon I neuer.
Wirke now thi wirchipe as þe worlde askes,
And brynge me to beryell, byd I no more.
Grete wele my ladye þe qwene, ȝife þe werlde happyne,
And all the burliche birdes þat to hir boure lengez;
And my worthily weife, þat wrethide me neuer.
Bid hire fore hir wyrchipe wirke for my saulle."[2] (2181–2192.)

[1] Then good Gawayn, gracious and noble,
All with glorious glee he gladdens his knights:
"Be naught dismayed, good men, for glittering shields,
Though yon fellows be gay on yon great horses.
Bannerets of Britain, busk up your hearts!
Be naught abashed at yon boys, nor at their bright clothes.
We shall blench their boast for all their bloody proffer."

[2] "Defend thyself, coward," and calls him soon,
Cleaves him with his clear brand clean asunder.
"Hadst thou well dealt thy dint with thy hands,
I had forgiven thee my death, by Christ now of heaven."
He wends to the wise king and winsomely him greets,
"I am perilously wounded; heal may I never.
Work now thy worship as the world asks,
And bring me to burial; ask I no more.

With such epic handling in the old English manner there are touches of an English love of nature.

All the feulez thare fleschez that flyez with wengez,
Fore thare galede þe gowke one grevez ful lowde;
With alkyn gladchipe þay gladden þem selven.
Of the nyghtgale notez þe noisez was swette.
They threpide wyth the throstills, thre hundreth at ones,
Pat whate swowynge of watyre and syngynge of byrdez,
It myghte salve hym of sore þat sounde was nevere.[1] (926–932.)

As befits the English epic conception, the moral tone is sterner and simpler than the usual tone of romance. There is no loose love-making; there is the old stress on loyalty as a cardinal virtue (page 13); there is a strong and simple faith in God as the supporter of justice.

Destiny and doughtiness of deeds of arms,
All is doomed and dealt at God's will. (1563–4.)

The epic warrior's fatalism appears as Christian faith. And it is an English trait that the poet thinks throughout his tale of moral aspects. His invocation, though it is cast in the conventional mold, is worth paraphrasing for its English moral earnestness.

Greet well my lady the queen if the world happen so,
And all the stately ladies that belong to her bower;
And my worthy wife, who angered me never,
Ask her for her worship to work for my soul."
[1] All the birds there flit that fly with wings;
For there sang the cuckoo in the groves full loud;
With every gladness they gladden themselves.
Of nightingale's notes the noise was sweet.
They strove with the throstles, three hundred at once,
That what with soughing of water and singing of birds,
It might heal him of hurt who whole was never.

Now great, glorious God, through grace of himself
And the precious prayer of his peerless mother,
Shield us from shame and sinful works,
And give us grace to guide and govern us here
In this wretched world through virtuous living,
That we may come to his court, the kingdom of heaven,
When our souls shall part and sunder from the body,
Ever to be and to bide in bliss with himself;
And thrill me to throw out some word at this time,
That neither void be nor vain, but worship to himself,
Pleasant and profitable to the people that hear.
Ye that lust have to listen, or love to hear
Of elders of old time and of their strange deeds,
How they were leal in their law, and loved God almighty,
Hearken to me graciously, and hold you still;
And I will tell you a tale that true is and noble.

The verse, as will be clear from the passages quoted, has a fine stir and swing, but not quite the variety and natural force of the old English. In spite of the picturesque words, — and they are often far-fetched — the poem sounds a little monotonous and not a little artificial. The old staves could not be quite revived. Whether the poet learned his alliterative rhythms from the old epic or, as is more probable, from its echoes in the ballads of oral tradition, he could not apply it entirely to a changed language and changed ways of thought and feeling. His conscious struggle appears in his overdoing of the alliteration. Thus his metrical effects are not the old metrical effects — those were gone forever — but new effects after all. Interesting and vigorous as the new alliterative verse is undoubtedly, it still reminds us, as later literary revivals do in their turn, that the hands cannot be turned back on the dial of time. It was a fine, patriotic attempt; but in the development of English verse very little came of it.

3. BARBOUR'S BRUCE[1]

The flourishing of poetry in the North awoke in patriotic John Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen, the great conception of applying romantic verse to a hero still living in men's memories, the national Scottish hero, Robert Bruce. Barbour wrote his long poem, the *Bruce* (1375) within fifty years of the death of its hero (1329). Though he deals, not with legend, but with history, with facts to be had almost at first hand, his love for the romances and his generous desire to make the figures of Bruce and Douglas inspiring, color his story romantically. James of Douglas, even more than the Bruce himself, appears as a pattern of chivalry. Riding to support Sir Thomas Randolph at the battle of Bannockburn, he checks his troop on seeing the enemy waver, lest he should mar Sir Thomas's honor of routing a superior foe alone (xii, 114); and this is but one of the instances by which Barbour loves to show his hero a perfect knight. Thoroughly a figure of romance is the Douglas carrying the heart of the Bruce to the Holy Land for burial. Like the paladins, he fights with the Saracens in Spain:

> The Bruces heart, that on his brest
> Was hinging, in the field he kest
> Vpon a stane-cast and well more;
> And said: "Now passe thou foorth before,
> As thou wast wont in field to be;
> And I sall follow or els de." (XX, 423–428.)

Like the great paladin Roland, he is overwhelmed by the Saracens (xx, 470); and he is lamented as Lancelot is lamented by Ector.

[1] Edited for the Early English Text Society by W. W. Skeat, London, 1870–1874.

Early in the story, Bruce comforts his little fellowship through a tedious delay by reading the romance of Sir Firumbras (iii. 437); and the poet in his own person cites to point the moral of his tale, not only the heroes of classical antiquity, but also the Celtic Gall MacMorna (iii. 68), and Gandifer, one of the heroes of the romance of Alexander the Great. The fighting of these meager outlaw days is clearly shown as guerilla warfare. Bruce rarely had more than a few hundred men. But in the midst of these raids and surprises the poet makes the English Sir Aymer de Valence issue the stock romantic challenge to fight on a day appointed under Loudoun Hill. There is no doubt that Barbour intended to be romantic.

But the romances that he loves most and quotes are the historical romances, the "matter of France" (page 76). And his Scotch pride, his race feeling, and his local knowledge make him dwell on the fights of Bruce or Douglas with epic fulness of specific concrete detail. Though the many actors of the story are not sharply distinguished, yet their actions are realized fully. Douglas surprising and sacking his own castle (v. 396), Sim Ledoux scaling the walls of Roxburgh (x. 352), and the successive scenes of the great national victory at Bannockburn (xi–xiii) stamp themselves on the mind by sheer concrete abundance. One of the most intense of these passages, and one of the most thoroughly epic, is in Book vi. The king, having just escaped assassination twice, is tracked by his pursuers with a sleuth-hound through a morass:

The king took with him two servants, leaving Sir Gilbert de la Hay to rest with his troop. He came to the water and listened intently if he heard aught of their coming; but yet he could hear nothing. Along the water on the other side he went a great space. He saw the braes standing high, the water running through un-

broken, and found no ford by which men might pass but where he himself had passed. And so strait was the upcoming that two men might not crowd so as to take the land together. His two men he then bade go to their fellows to rest, for he would keep the watch there. "Sir," said they, "who shall be with you?"

"God," he said, "forouten ma.
Pass on; for I will it be swa."

When he had bided there a while, he heard as it were a hound's whistling afar, which ever came nearer and nearer. . . . But he still thought he would stand there till he heard more tokenings; for he would not waken his companions for a hound's whistling. . . . The moon was shining right clearly. . . . And so long he stood hearkening till he saw at hand the whole rout coming in full great haste. Then he bethought him that, if he went to fetch his company, the pursuers would all have passed the ford before he could return, and that then he must choose either to flee or to die. But his heart, which was stout and high, counseled him to abide alone and keep them at the ford and defend well the upcoming, since he had on mail to guard him from their arrows. For if he were of great manhood, he might daunt them all, since they could come on but one by one. He did even as his heart bade him. Stark outrageous courage he had when he so stoutly took upon himself to fight alone with two hundred and more. Therewith he went to the water; and they upon the other party, who saw him stand there alone, rode thronging into the water; for they had little fear of him and rode to him in full great haste. He smote the first so rigorously with his spear, which cut right sharply, that he bore him down to the earth. The rest came then in a rush. But the horse of the man that was borne down cumbered the pass; and when the king saw that it was so he stabbed the horse, who kicked and then fell in the pass.

The rest with that came with a shout;
And he that stalwart was and stout
Met them right stoutly at the brae,
And so fully he did them pay

That some five in the ford he slew.
The rest a little space withdrew,
That dreaded his strokes wondrous sore,
For he in nothing them forbore.
Then one said "Certes, we are to blame.
What shall we say when we come hame,
When one man fights against us all?
Who wist ever men so foully fall
As we if we this way fight shy?"
With that together they raised a cry
And shouted "On him! he cannot last."
With that they pressed on him so fast
That had he not the better been,
He had been dead, as ye may ween.
But his defense so stemmed that folk
That where he hit with even stroke
There might nothing against it stand.
Shortly there fell beneath his hand
So many that the ford was then
Clogged with slain horses and men,
So that his foes, for that stoppíng,
Might not come to the upcomíng.
Ah! dear God! he who had been by
And seen how he so hardily
Addressed himself against them all,
I wot well that he should him call
The best that lived in all his day.
And if I too the sooth shall say,
I heard never in all time gone
One stop so many himself alone.

(VI, 67–178, the verse slightly modernized.)

In spite of the rudeness of verse and style, there is the epic force of national feeling and of telling detail. The parallel of Tydeus, by which Barbour illustrates forthwith this splendid holding of the ford, may have been drawn from

Statius's Latin or from Boccaccio's romantic Italian version of the same story; but in either case the example of a hero holding a pass against a throng of enemies is typically epic.

Barbour's narrative skill goes no further than this force of sheer incident abundantly realized. As his verse is often diffuse and monotonous, so his story moves at an even gait in simple chronological order without much plan. Description of natural scenery occurs only in a few passages so conventional as to borrow for poetic adornment even the nightingale (v. 4), which never sings in Scotland. What is realized is action. The *Bruce* is a Scotch *chanson de geste.*

(a) The War Songs of Laurence Minot[1]

On the English side of these struggles, Laurence Minot, who lived in the first half of the fourteenth century, wrote boasting verse in praise of King Edward and in scorn of the Scots. As an offset to Bannockburn he extols the victories of Halidon Hill and Neville's Cross; but most of his poems deal with the war in France. They are short, usually cast in rather rude stanzas, and depend for poetic effect on alliteration and biting phrase. There is no sustained power in either verse or idea. Instead of Barbour's epic fulness of descriptive detail, there is bare mention of facts. For instance, the noble and pathetic story of the burgesses of Calais is told simply as follows:

Lystens now, and ye may lere,[2]
  Als men the suth may vnderstand,
The knightes that in Calais were
  Come to sir Edward sare wepeand,[3]

[1] The Poems of Laurence Minot, edited by Joseph Hall, Oxford (Clarendon Press), 1887.

[2] learn. [3] weeping.

In kirtell one and swerd in hand,
And cried, Sir Edward, thine we are;
Do now, lord, bi law of land
Thi will with us for euermare.

The noble burgase and the best
Come vnto him to haue thaire hire.
The comun puple war ful prest [1]
Rapes to bring obout thaire swire,[2]
Thai said all, Sir Philip oure syre,
And his sun, sir Iohn of France,
Has left vs ligand [3] in the mire
And broght vs till this doleful dance.

Our horses that war faire and fat
Are etin vp ilkone bidene;
Haue we nowther conig [5] ne cat
That thai ne er etin and hundes kene.
All er etin vp ful clene;
Es nowther leuid biche ne whelp.
That es wele on oure sembland [6] sene;
And thai er fled that suld vs help.

(Hall's edition, page 29.)

On the other hand, these rude verses constantly sound as if they had been made at or near the very time. They express the national pride, the communal feeling of epic, so directly that, though they lack narrative or descriptive power, they have the appeal of sheer boyish brag.

Was thou noght, Franceis, with thi wapin [7]
Bitwixen Cressy and Abuyle?
Whare thi felaws lien and gapin,[8]
For all thaire treget [9] and thaire gile.

[1] ready.
[2] necks.
[3] lying.
[4] every one eaten up at once.
[5] rabbit.
[6] semblance, countenance.
[7] weapon.
[8] lie and gape.
[9] magic, sleight.

Bischoppes war there in that while
That songen all withouten stole.
Philip the Valas was a file;[1]
He fled and durst noght tak his dole.
(Hall's edition, page 25.)

4. GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT[2]

Among the poets who revived alliteration was at least one of marked originality and mastery of both story-telling and verse. Beside his narrative art the story of the *Bruce* seems rude and bungling; beside his verse much of the verse of his time is little better than doggerel. Whoever he was — even his name is unknown — he was a very unusual literary artist; for if he wrote no more than the two poems that proclaim themselves his by having in common marked distinctions of style,[3]

[1] vile; i.e., coward.

[2] Edited for the Early English Text Society by R. Morris, London, 1864, revised 1897.

[3] Two other poems, *Clannesse* (Purity) and *Patience*, have been assigned to the same author, partly because they are found in the same manuscript, partly because they are thought to have similar style. The only definite and obvious similarity of style, besides the alliteration, is the abundance and vigor of description. In this, indeed, all four poems are alike eminent. But the descriptions of *Clannesse* and *Patience* have not the delicacy and brilliancy of those in *Pearl* and *Gawain*. They may well be the work of a ruder hand. Certainly a less practised hand made the verse, either another hand or the same hand in earlier years, before its art was fully developed. In structure there is no likeness at all, *Clannesse* and *Patience* being simple homilies carried out by examples from the Bible. Since the most distinctive beauty of either *Pearl* or *Gawain* is artistic structure, the hypothesis of common authorship needs much more definite support than it has yet received. *Pearl*, *Clannesse*, and *Patience* are edited (*Early English Alliterative Poems*) by R. Morris for the Early English Text Society (London, 1864, 1896). They are translated by Miss Jessie L. Weston in her *Romance, Vision, and Satire* (Boston and New York, 1912). The authorship is discussed by George Neilson, *Huchown of the Awle Ryale*, Glasgow, 1902.

he is quite worthy of a place beside Chaucer. Of these, *Pearl* will be discussed later as a lyric (page 173). *Gawain and the Green Knight* is a short verse-romance (2530 lines) which, outside of the work of Chaucer, is unsurpassed in nice adjustment of the story-plan, in brilliancy and delicacy of descriptive detail, and in freedom and power of verse.[1]

As Arthur held high feast on New Year's Day, and would not eat till he had beheld some adventure, a huge knight, clad all in green, rode into the hall, in one hand a holly bough, in the other an axe, seeking the best knight to prove him. If any of the Table Round, he said, were brave enough to smite him with the axe, that knight should keep it for his own, but must agree to take a stroke in return within a twelvemonth and a day. Gawain receiving this adventure and beheading him, the Green Knight picked up his head and rode off with it, bidding Gawain meet him at the Green Chapel according to the promise for the return stroke. As the next New Year drew nigh, Gawain, riding wild ways afar in his search, was received and nobly entertained at Christmastide in a castle whose lord promised to escort him betimes to the Green Chapel hard by. Meantime showing as a guest the noblest and most scrupulous courtesy, Gawain was three times tempted by his host's lady in vain. Then standing by the Green Chapel to receive the return stroke, he was but grazed; for the Green Knight, revealing himself as the lord of the castle and the deviser of the temptations, declared himself satisfied that Gawain was indeed worthy.

Though in this form the story is otherwise unknown, its substance is familiar romantic material. The originality is in the way of telling. Instead of reviewing many of Gawain's adventures, the story is confined to one; and even within this single adventure, that our interest may be centered upon the victory of chivalry over base selfish gratification, all minor episodes are passed over swiftly. Gawain's adventures

[1] Compare, for instance, the strong but much ruder *Ywain and Gawain* (page 103).

during his ride to the castle, which most medieval romancers would have told at as great length as the central theme of the temptation, are compressed within two stanzas out of the hundred. The first of these is remarkable for its description:

Many cliffs he climbed in countries strange;
Far flitted from his friends as a foe he rides.
At each way over water that the warrior passed
He found a foe before him — if not 'twas a wonder —
And that so foul and so fell that fighting was certain.
So many marvels at the mount there may be found
It were too tedious to tell of the tenth part.
Sometimes with serpents he wars, and with wolves also.
Sometimes with were-wolves that dwelt in the knots;
Both with bulls and with bears and with boars other times,
And monsters that made after him from the high moors.
Had he not been doughty and daring and served God,
Doubtless he had been slain, or stricken full often.
For war wounded him not so much; but winter was worse,
When the cold, clear water from the clouds was shed,
And froze ere it fell to the fallow earth.
Near slain with the sleet, he slept in his harness,
More nights than enough in the naked rocks,
Where clattering from the crest the cold burn trickled
And hung on high over his head in hard icicles.
Thus in peril and pain and plights full hard
Across the country he comes till Christmas even
Doth fall.
The knight well that tide
On Mary Queen did call
To rede him where to ride
And help him to some hall.[1] (Lines 713–739.)

[1] The translation here and on the following pages keeps the form of the original in alliteration, sentence-movement, and final rimes, and, except at the ends of the lines, which on account of the sounded *-e* may have been "feminine," in rhythm also.

This stanza will show that the author, even where he compresses, does not lapse into bare summary. Indeed, the merit of this story is not swiftness of action, but richness and fulness of description within the field on which our attention is fixed. The interest is held, not by the excitement of activity, but by the very vividness of the situation. Day after day, in order to give opportunity for the temptation, Gawain's host goes to hunt. Each hunt is described; each is so different from the others that there is no tedious repetition; and, for further variety, the second hunt is cleverly interrupted by the main story. Description of nature shows observation at once so sharp and so delicate as to give of itself poetic distinction. The six lines, rendered just above, describing a sleet storm, will bear comparison with Chaucer, and can hardly be paralleled in any other author of the time. A few lines beyond, Gawain rides through a wood

> Of hoar oaks full huge, a hundred together.
> The hazel and the hawthorn were huddled in a thicket,
> With rough, ragged moss arrayed all over,
> With many birds unblithe upon bare branches,
> That piteously there peeped for pain of the cold. (743–747.)

Gawain sallies forth on New Year's morn to the Green Chapel:

> They bent by the banks where the branches were bare;
> They climbed by the cliffs where clutches the cold.
> . . . . . .
> Mist-mows were on the moor, melted on the mountains.
> Each hillock had a hat, a mist-mantle huge.
> Brooks bubbled and broke by the banks all about,
> Shattering sheer on the shores as they shoved downward.
> (2077–2083.)

At the opening of Part II is a lyric of the seasons:

After Christmas came the crabbed Lent,
Which tries the flesh with fish and food more simple.
But then the weather of the world rebukes the winter.
Cold is clutching adown; clouds are uplifting,
Shedding the rain sheer in showers full warm.
Filled is the fair field; flowers there are blooming.
On the ground and in the groves the green is a garment.
Birds are busking to build and heartily singing
For solace of the soft summer now stretching along
The dike;
And blossoms are bursting to blow
In rows all rich alike.
Then notes noble enow
Across the woodland strike.

Afterward summer ensues with the soft breezes,
When Zephyrus sighs himself on the seeds and the herbage.
Well is it with the wort that waxes thereout,
When the dampening dew drops from the leaflets,
To bide a blissful blush of the bright sunshine.
But then hies the harvest and hardens it soon,
Warns it for the winter to wax and ripen.
He drives with his drought the dust that rises
From the face of the field to fly full high.
Wildly winds of the welkin war with the sun.
The leaves are loosened from the limbs and light on the ground,
And all gray make the grass that green was before.
Then all ripens and rots that rose from the field;
And thus hastens the year into yesterdays many,
And winter is with us again; for no word gains us
Delay.
Lo! Michaelmas moon
Was come with winter's pay.
Then thinks Sir Gawain full soon
He must be now away. (503–535.)

Passing references to the seasons are not, indeed, uncommon in the romances; but they are usually quite conventional and bare (page 130). Here the fulness and distinctness of detail evidently come from joy in the good out-of-doors.

But fond as the poet is of out-of-doors, he is fonder of in-doors. Besides his unusual realization of scenery there is a still larger realization of the human setting, the habits of lords and ladies in the days of chivalry. Nowhere else within the same compass, and in few other works of many times the length, can be found pictures so bright and clear of the life of the medieval castle. The poet arms Gawain as Homer arms Achilles, with such attention to details that we can reconstruct the scene:

He dwelt there all that day, and on the morn he arose and asked betimes for his armour; and they brought it unto him on this wise: first, a rich carpet was stretched on the floor (and brightly did the gold gear glitter upon it); then the knight stepped on to it, and handled the steel; clad he was in a doublet of silk, with a close hood, lined fairly throughout. Then they set the steel shoes upon his feet, and wrapped his legs with greaves, with polished knee-caps, fastened with knots of gold. Then they cased his thighs in cuisses closed with thongs, and brought him the byrny of bright steel rings sewn upon a fair stuff. Well burnished braces they set on each arm with good elbow pieces, and gloves of mail, and all the goodly gear that should shield him in his need. And they cast over all a rich surcoat, and set the golden spurs on his heels, and girt him with a trusty sword fastened with a silken bawdrick. When he was thus clad, his harness was costly; for the least loop or latchet gleamed with gold. So armed as he was, he hearkened Mass and made his offering at the high altar. Then he came to the king and the knights of his court, and courteously took leave of lords and ladies; and they kissed him and commended him to Christ.

With that was Gringalet ready, girt with a saddle that gleamed

gaily with many golden fringes, enriched and decked anew for the venture. The bridle was all barred about with bright gold buttons, and all the couvertures and trappings of the steed, the crupper and the rich skirts, accorded with the saddle, spread fair with the rich red gold that glittered and gleamed in the rays of the sun.

Then the knight called for his helmet, which was well lined throughout, and set it high on his head, and hasped it behind. He wore a light kerchief over the ventail, that was broidered and studded with fair gems on a broad silken ribbon, with birds of gay colour, and many a turtle and true-lover's knot interlaced thickly, even as many a maiden had wrought diligently for seven winters long. But the circlet which crowned his helmet was yet more precious, being adorned with a device in diamonds. Then they brought him his shield, which was of bright red, with the pentangle painted thereon in gleaming gold.

Lines 566–620, pages 22–24 of Miss Weston's prose translation.[1]

Is it not plain that the poet thus elaborates detail not only to help us imagine ourselves with Gawain, but also for love of the detail itself, for sheer artistic pleasure in all this light and color? Picturesqueness he evidently cares for more than for the movement of the story. But though it is leisurely enough to show every scene fully, the tale does not lag. The abundance of description includes such delicate suggestions in speech and dialogue as add the interest of character. Though the little romance opens with a most romantic marvel, the rest of it, the bulk of the story, is interesting rather as a situation involving character. The Green Knight as seen in his own castle has more individuality than the usual personage of a romance. His lady is still

[1] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a Middle-English Arthurian Romance Retold in Modern Prose. . . . Jessie L. Weston (London, 1900, in the series entitled *Arthurian Romances Unrepresented in Malory's "Morte d'Arthur,"* 1). The same author has a verse translation in her *Romance, Vision, and Satire* (Boston and New York, 1912).

more distinct; and Gawain emerges with something of that clearness of conception which makes Chaucer's Cressida seem startlingly modern, and for which English literature in general was not ready until it had been taught by the drama. The proving of a knight by a lady was already an old story when it was retold by this unknown poet; but in retelling it he reconceived it; he made it no longer *a* knight and *a* lady, but persons that sometimes seem to us, even in their long-forgotten setting, almost real.

In the verse the most marked trait is freedom. The stanzas, though alike in their oddly pretty riming close and in keeping their other lines, the bulk of each stanza, alliterative without rime, are not alike in length. The average is about twenty-four lines; but the stanzas vary from twenty lines, or even less, to forty or more. Each stanza is treated as a kind of narrative paragraph, concluded, like the scenes of Elizabethan drama, with rime. And so the verse too is made part of the structure of the story. For the poet of *Gawain* and *Pearl*, alike in the plan of the whole and in the adjustment of each detail, was a literary artist.

5. MALORY'S MORTE D'ARTHUR

No survey of English medieval romance can omit Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur;* for this, though it was written in 1470 and printed by Caxton in 1495, is thoroughly medieval. The Renaissance, by this time well advanced in Italy, had not yet affected England very widely; and, even if it had been felt generally, it would not, we may guess, have deeply affected Sir Thomas Malory. Living some seventy years after Chaucer, he is distinctly less modern. Chaucer sometimes looks forward toward the Renaissance; Malory looks back. Not only does he turn away from the Wars of the Roses to the far wars of Arthur, but in his wist-

ful sympathy with the old ideals of a passing chivalry he keeps the medieval spirit. Besides, his *Morte d'Arthur* has been far more popular than any other English version of the Arthur stories. For both these reasons it fairly sums up the influential traits of English medieval romance.

The spirit of romance and something of its history are reflected even in Caxton's preface; for the first English printer, being also publisher, editor, and man of letters, could estimate Malory's work with literary appreciation.

After that I had accomplysshed and fynysshed dyuers hystoryes as wel of contemplacyon as of other hystoryal and worldly actes of grete conquerours & prynces, and also certeyn bookes of ensamples and doctryne, Many noble and dyuers gentylmen of thys royame of Englond camen and demaunded me many and oftymes wherfore that I haue not do made & enprynte the noble hystorye of the saynt greal and of the most renomed crysten kyng, Fyrst and chyef of the thre best crysten and worthy, kyng Arthur, whych ought moost to be remembred emonge us englysshe men tofore al other crysten kynges. For it is notoyrly knowen thorugh the vnyuersal world that there been ix worthy & the best that euer were; That is to wete, thre paynyms, thre Iewes, and thre crysten men. As for the paynyms, they were tofore the Incarnacyon of Cryst, whiche were named, the fyrst, Hector of Troye, of whom thystorye is comen bothe in balade and in prose; The second, Alysaunder the grete; & the thyrd, Iulyus Cezar, Emperour of Rome, of whome thystoryes ben wel kno and had. And as for the thre Iewes, whyche also were tofore thyncarnacyon of our lord, of whome the fyrst was Duc Iosue, whyche brought the chyldren of Israhel in to the londe of byheste; The second, Dauyd, kyng of Iherusalem; & the thyrd, Iudas Machabeus;—of these thre the byble reherceth al theyr noble hystoryes & actes. And sythe the sayd Incarnacyon haue ben thre noble crysten men stalled and admytted thorugh the vnyuersal world in to the nombre of the ix beste & worthy, of whome was fyrst the noble Arthur, whos noble

actes I purpose to wryte in thys present book here folowyng; The second was Charlemayn, or Charles the grete, of whome thystorye is had in many places bothe in frensshe and englysshe; and the thyrd and last was Godefray of boloyn, of whos actes & lyf I made a book vnto thexcellent prynce and kyng of noble memorye, kyng Edward the fourth. The sayd noble Ientylmen instantly requyred me temprynte thystorye of the sayd noble kyng and conquerour, kyng Arthur, and of his knyghtes, wyth thystorye of the saynt greal and of the deth and endyng of the sayd Arthur, Affermyng that I ought rather tenprynte his actes and noble feates than of godefroye of boloyne or ony the other eyght. . . . I haue after the symple connynge that god hath sente to me, vnder the fauour and correctyon of al noble lordes and gentylmen enprysed to enprynte a book of the noble hystoryes of the sayd kynge Arthur and of certeyn of his knyghtes after a copye vnto me delyuerd, whyche copye Syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of frensshe and reduced it in to Englysshe. And I, accordyng to my copye haue doon sette it in enprynte, to the entente that noble men may see and lerne the noble actes of chyualrye, the Ientyl and vertuous dedes that somme knyghtes vsed in tho dayes, by whyche they came to honour, and how they that were vycious were punysshed and ofte put to shame and rebuke, humbly bysechyng al noble lordes and ladyes, wyth al other estates, of what estate or degree they been of that shal see and rede in this sayd book and werke, that they take the good and honest actes in their remembraunce and to folowe the same. Wherin they shalle fynde many Ioyous and playsaunt hystoryes and noble & renomed actes of humanyte, gentylnesse, and chyualryes. For herein may be seen noble chyualrye, Curtoyse, Humanyte, frendlynesse, hardynesse, loue, frendshyp, Cowardyse, Murdre, hate, vertue, and synne. Doo after the good and leue the euyl; and it shal brynge you to good fame and renommee.

Sir Thomas Malory had probably seen knightly service under that mirror of chivalry, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, who traced his lineage to the legendary Guy

(page 116). That Malory cherished chivalry in a day when chivalry was passing there is ample evidence in every chapter. His whole long task shines as a labor of love; and he is at his best in so praising the high deeds of knighthood as to stir generous emulation. To take one instance out of a hundred, the combat of Beaumains and Lancelot carries beneath the frank directness of the rendering a fine suggestion of the gallantry of youth.

Thenne he profered sir launcelot to Iuste and eyther made hem redy, and they came to gyder soo fyersly that eyther bare doune other to the erthe, and sore were they brysed. Thenne sir launcelot arose and halpe hym fro his hors. And thenne beaumayns threwe his sheld from hym and profered to fyghte with sir launcelot on foote; and soo they rasshed to gyders lyke borys, thracynge, rasynge, and foynynge to the mountenaunce of an houre; and syre launcelot felte hym soo bygge that he merueylled of his strengthe, for he fought more lyker a gyaunt than a knyght, and that his fyghtynge was durable and passynge perillous. For syr launcelot had so moche adoo with hym that he dred hym self to be shamed, and sayd, "Beaumayns, fyghte not so sore; youre quarel and myn is not soo grete but we may leue of." "Truly that is trouthe," sayd Beaumayns; "but it doth me good to fele your myght, and yet, my lord, I shewed not the vtteraunce." "In goddes name!" sayd syr launcelot; "for I promyse you by the feythe of my body I had as moche to doo as I myght to saue my self fro you vnshamed, and therfore haue ye no doubte of none erthely knyghte." "Hope ye so that I maye ony whyle stand a proued knyght?" sayd Beaumayns. "Ye," sayd Launcelot; "doo as ye haue done, and I shal be your waraunt." "Thenne I praye you," sayd Beaumayns, "yeue me the ordre of knyghthode."

Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, VII, iv–v.

Such passages warm the heart.

And Malory has warmed more English hearts than any other English romancer of the older day. This affection has

led some of his more enthusiastic admirers to claim for him the larger excellencies of composition. Sir Edward Strachey, whose excellent modernized reprint did much to popularize the *Morte d'Arthur* in the nineteenth century, speaks of Malory's "epic unity and harmony."[1] Instead of disputing whether epic has unity, or whether the *Morte d'Arthur* is in any sense epic, we may consider directly whether Malory can be said to have achieved unity. His version of the Tristram story is no better welded to the Arthur cycle than by other compilers. In fact, it remains so distinct that it could be detached without disturbing the structure. His version of the Grail story, though wrought into the structure, does not consistently further the main narrative. Instead, it is partly told several times; and the story in which it appears first, the fine tale of Balin and Balan, has no specific relation to the rest of the book. Even if the many component stories of the *Morte d'Arthur* were better joined, we could not confidently praise Malory for this excellence without more evidence as to which French manuscripts he used; but in fact the stories are not well joined. Rather the *Morte d'Arthur is* a typical collective romance (page 89), made, as the earlier cycles had been made, by aggregation. Its only large constructive excellence is a certain culmination toward the close. Malory had not the constructive skill of Chrétien or the author of *Gawain and the Green Knight.* Nor is there any indication that he wished to work in this fashion. For choosing from the huge Arthurian mass of his time, and sometimes for reconciling different versions in a clear account, he undoubtedly deserves credit,[2] but not for build-

[1] Page viii of Strachey's introduction to the Globe edition.

[2] Some of Malory's immediate sources are indicated briefly at page xxxvii of Mead's introduction to his edition of *Selections from Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur* (Boston, 1897, Athenæum Press

ing his materials into a structurally new and unified whole. Except in style, he is the typical medieval transmitter.

But the style is a large and significant exception. In style no other long English romance approaches the work of Malory.

But syr launcelot rode ouerthwart and endlonge in a wylde forest, and held no pathe but as wyld aduenture led hym. And at the last he came to a stony Crosse whiche departed two wayes in waste land; and by the Crosse was a stone that was of marbel, but it was so derke that syr launcelot myghte not wete what it was. Thenne syre Launcelot loked by hym and sawe an old chappel, & ther he wende to haue fond peple; and sir launcelot teyed his hors tyl a tree, and there he dyd of his sheld and henge hit vpon a tree. And thenne wente to the chappel dore and fonde hit waste and broken. And within he fond a fayr aulter ful rychely arayed with clothe of clene sylke; and there stode a fayre clene candelstyk whiche bare syxe grete candels; and the candelstyk was of syluer. And whanne syre Launcelot sawe thys lyght, he had grete wylle for to entre in to the chappel; but he coude fynde no place where he myghte entre; thenne was he passynge heuy and desmayed. Thenne he retorned and cam to his hors and dyd of his sadel and brydel and lete hym pasture, & vnlaced his helme and vngyrd his swerd and laide hym doune to slepe vpon his shelde to fore the Crosse.

Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, XIII, xvii.

This passage fairly exemplifies Malory's prose. It is less terse than the one quoted above, less terse than many others that might be quoted; but in this respect it is the more typical of Malory's usual leisurely and lingering manner. The childish compound sentences are characteristic, not of Malory,

Series), and more extensively in Sommer's elaborate introduction to his *Le Morte Darthur by Syr Thomas Malory* (London, 1889–1890), which is a complete and careful reprint from the original Caxton and is the definitive modern edition.

but of the half-formed sentence habit of his time. But the imaginative realization of the scene in direct simplicity of phrase is Malory's singular virtue. He has the distinction and the charm of the great chroniclers, of Herodotus, of Froissart, of Villani, the ability to tell a story, not rapidly indeed, but at once sweetly and strongly while always telling it simply. At his moments of deeper emotion he rises to eloquence. Tennyson's more elaborate rendering has not dimmed Malory's Passing of Arthur.

"Tyde me deth, betyde me lyf," sayth the kyng; "now I see hym yonder allone, he shal neuer escape myn handes; For at a better auaylle shal I neuer haue hym." "God spede you wel," sayd syr bedwere. Thenne the kyng gate hys spere in bothe his handes & ranne toward syr Mordred, cryeng "tratour, now is thy deth day come." And whan syr Mordred herde syr Arthur, he ranne vntyl hym with his swerde drawen in his hande. And there kyng Arthur smote syr mordred vnder the shelde wyth a foyne of his spere thorughoute the body more than a fadom. And whan syr Mordred felte that he had hys dethes wounde, He thryste him self wyth the myght that he had vp to the bur of kynge Arthurs spere. And right so he smote his fader Arthur wyth his swerde holden in bothe his handes on the syde of the heed, that the swerde persyd the helmet and the brayne panne; and therwythall syr Mordred fyl starke deed to the erthe. And the nobyl Arthur fyl in a swoune, and there he swouned ofte tymes. And syr Lucan de butlere and syr Bedwere ofttymes heue hym up. And soo waykely they ledde hym betwyxte them bothe to a lytel chapel not ferre from the see syde. . . . "Alas!" sayd the kyng; "thys is to me a ful heuy syght, to see thys noble duke so deye for my sake; for he wold haue holpen me that had more nede of helpe than I. Alas! he wold not complayne hym, hys herte was so sette to helpe me. Now Ihesu haue mercy vpon hys soule." then syr bedwere wepte for the deth of his brother. "leue thys mornyng & wepyng," sayd the kyng; "for al this wyl not auaylle me; for

wyte thou wel and I myghte lyue my self, the deth of syr Lucan wolde greue me euer more; but my tyme hyeth fast. . . . Than syr bedwere cryed "A, my lord Arthur, what shal become of me, now ye goo from me And leue me here allone emonge myn enemyes?" "Comfort thy self," sayd the kyng, "and doo as wel as thou mayst; for in me is no truste for to truste in. For I wyl in to the vale of auylyon to hele me of my greuous wounde. And yf thou here neuer more of me, praye for my soule."

Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, XXI, iv–v.

The diction of such passages is essentially like the diction of the best narrative of the Old Testament.

And David sat between the two gates; and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold a man running alone. And the watchman cried and told the king. And the king said, "If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth." And he came apace and drew near. And the watchman saw another man running; and the watchman called unto the porter and said, "Behold another man running alone." And the king said, "He also bringeth tidings." And the watchman said, "Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings." And Ahimaaz called and said unto the king, "All is well." And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king and said, "Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king." And the king said, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" And Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult; but I knew not what it was." And the king said unto him "Turn aside, and stand here." And he turned aside, and stood still. And, behold, Cushi came; and Cushi said, "Tidings, my lord the king; for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee." And the king said unto Cushi, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" And Cushi answered, "The

enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 *Samuel*, xviii, 24–33.

For the *Morte d'Arthur*, like the English Bible, is a great translation.

CHAPTER V

LYRIC AND ALLEGORY

1. ENGLISH LYRIC STANZAS AT THE OPENING OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Lyric, the poetry of personal feeling, in the English middle age is incidental. The characteristic literary expression of the time is narrative. Incidental in the narrative are lyric passages, some of them, indeed, conventional (pages 130, 132), but some highly individual (pages 134, 146); and incidentally to their main concern with narrative form some medieval Englishmen learned to express themselves in complete lyric poems of striking beauty. These few poems are enough to show an early mastery of the stanza. The art of the stanza, or verse-group, which only in lyric poetry has full opportunity for the adaptation of form to feeling, reached considerable development in English even in the fourteenth century. Very early in the century belongs the love song called *Alysoun*.

1. Bytuene Mershe & Aueril
2. When spray biginneþ to springe,
3. Þe lutel foul haþ hire wyl
4. On hyre lud to synge.
5. Ich libbe in louelonginge
6. For semlokest of alle þynge.
7. He may me blisse bringe;
8. Icham in hire baundoun.
9. An hendy hap ichabbe yhent;

10. Ichot from heuene it is me sent;
11. From alle wymmen mi loue is lent,
12. And lyht on Alysoun.[1]

Representing recurring rimes by the same letters, we may indicate the scheme of rimes as a b a b b b b c d d d c. Lines 1, 3, 6, 9, 10, and 11 have four stresses, or accents; lines 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 12, three stresses. Simple as is this stanza, it so links its three quatrains by the rimes that it is held together as a single whole; and it calls for some facility by riming five times on one sound. What is more vital, it has the true lyric quality of smoothness. It sings itself. As early as 1300, or soon after, Englishmen could write singing stanzas. Further testimony of their skill is a *Spring Song* of three twelve-line stanzas. The first stanza runs:

Lenten ys come wiþ loue to toune
Wiþ blosmen & wiþ briddes roune,
Þat al þis blisse bryngeþ.
Dayes-eȝes in þis dales,

[1] Morris and Skeat's *Specimens of Early English*, Part II, page 43.

Between March and April,
When green shoots begin to spring,
The little bird hath her will
In her wise to sing.
I live in love-longing
For the fairest of all earthly things.
She may me bliss bring;
I am in her power.
A fair hap have I got;
I wot from heaven it is sent to me;
From all women my love is taken,
And lights on Alysoun.

The final quatrain, or group of four lines, is repeated at the end of each stanza (see page 139); and there are four stanzas in all. The final *-e* is generally sounded, except where it immediately precedes a vowel in the same line.

Notes suete of nyhtegales;
Vch foul song singeþ.
Þe þrestlecoc him þreteþ oo;
Away is huere wynter wo,
When woderoue springeþ.
Þis foules singeþ ferly fele,
And wlyteþ on huere wynter wele,
Þat al þe wode ryngeþ.[1]

[1] Morris and Skeat's *Specimens of Early English*, Part II, page 48.

Spring is come with love to the farmstead
With blossoms and with rune of birds,
Which bring all this bliss.
Daisies in these dales,
Notes sweet of nightingales;
Each bird sings its song.
The throstlecock ay makes his plaint;
(But) gone is their winter woe
When the woodruff springs.
These birds sing wondrous many
And whistle to their winter joy,
That all the wood rings.

Or, roughly to imitate the meter:

Springtime is come with love to the dwelling.
The blossoms and the birds are telling
What all this rapture bringeth;
Daisies over all the meadows,
Nightingales within the shadows;
Each bird song singeth.
Complaineth but the throstlecock;
The rest of winter make their mock
When yellow woodruff springeth.
But winter joys full many twitter,
Southward beyond our tempests bitter,
That all the woodland ringeth.

2. PEARL,[1] A MEDIEVAL ENGLISH ELEGY (ABOUT 1370)

Þat spot of spyseȝ mot nedeȝ sprede,
Þer such rycheȝ to rot is runne;
Blomeȝ blayke & blwe & rede
Þer schyneȝ ful schyr agayn þe sunne;
Flor & fryte may not be fede
Þer hit doun drof in moldeȝ dunne;
For vch gresse mot grow of grayneȝ dede,
No whete were elleȝ to woneȝ wonne;
Of goud vche goude is ay bygonne;
So semly a sede moȝte fayly not,
Þat spryngand spyceȝ vp ne sponne
Of þat precios perle wythouten spotte.[2]

The beauty of verse, which is an incidental charm of *Gawain and the Green Knight*, is also one of the reasons for assigning to the same unknown author the longest and most beautiful of medieval English lyrics, the *Pearl*. Both poems

[1] Edited by R. Morris for the Early English Text Society, with *Cleanness* and *Patience* (*Early English Alliterative Poems*, London, 1864, 1896); re-edited separately by C. G. Osgood, Boston, 1906.

[2] *Pearl*, stanza 3; Osgood's edition, page 2. Translations of the poem are noted below. This stanza, which refers to the grave of the dead child, may be rendered imitatively as follows:

That spot with spices must grow and spread
Where such richness to rot is run.
Blooms of yellow and blue and red
Are pure in their pride to meet the sun.
Flower and fruit are unwitherèd
Where it down drove in mold all dun.
For each grass must grow from grains that are dead;
No wheat were else for our winter won.
Of good each good is ay begun.
So seemly a seeding suffers not
That springing spices the grave should shun
Of that precious pearl without a spot.

are marked, though in different ways, by an artistic sense of form, a shaping of the whole and a delicate use of detail. *Pearl* has one hundred stanzas in twenty groups of five, each group of five bound together by a refrain, that is by the recurrence of a word or phrase in the last line of each stanza. "Precious pearl without a spot," for instance, recurs at the end of each stanza in the first group. Each group, moreover, echoes in its first line the refrain of the preceding group. The stanza, as will be seen above, is of twelve four-stress alliterative lines rhyming a b a b a b a b b c b c. The closing rime (c), being the refrain, is the same in all five stanzas of a group. In other words, the poet rimes on one sound six times in each stanza, and on another sound ten times in each group. Such a rime-scheme has harmonies far beyond the simple stanzas quoted above from the beginning of the century. The technical difficulty that would baffle ordinary skill in verse-composition merely stimulates the better artist. The poet of *Pearl* has handled his complicated metrical scheme with such smoothness that we are rarely reminded of it. We simply feel the beauty of the verse chiming with the beauty of the description to attune our hearts to the message. This is the achievement of high art, so to merge itself in its effects, so to hide the means in the end, that we do not think of them separately. Stanzas and stanza-groups — our only reason for analyzing a lyric under such heads is that the technical mastery in *Pearl* is very significant as showing what power had been developed in English lyric poetry of communicating truth by beauty. So the subtler and choicer verse-harmonies achieved by the poet of *Pearl* are a sign at once of his genius and of that progress of English language and English literary art which we are studying.

The pattern of the *Pearl* stanza, with its alliterations,

rimes, refrain, and metrical movement, can be seen better in the following imitative rendering of stanza 10, which describes the river of Paradise.[1]

The comeliness of its current keeping,
Were beauteous banks of beryl bright.
Swiftly and sweetly the water was sweeping,
With the rune of the ripples running aright.
And its depths a hoard without hands was heaping,
As glimpsed through glass aglow to the sight,
As starlight when stolid souls are sleeping
Streams from the welkin some winter night.
For never a pebble in pool there pight
But was emerald, sapphire, or sard to guess,
That all the length was liquid light,
So clear was all that comeliness.

The poetic idea expressed in these verse-harmonies is of a father returning to mourn at the grave of his child and blessed with a vision of her in Paradise. The medieval Italian poet

[1] Mr. G. G. Coulton's pretty and suggestive translation of the whole poem (London, David Nutt, 1907), though it keeps the descriptive richness of the original and happily imitates some of its metrical effects, is obliged to forfeit much of its metrical variety. The same lack is felt even in the translation by Miss Sophie Jewett (New York, 1908). For in the original many of the lines have the variety of dactylic measures or "feminine" endings; and this gives a different, and a much smoother and lighter, metrical movement. Dr. Weir Mitchell, without attempting metrical imitation, has kept the poetic spirit of the original in a metrical rendering of unusual dignity (New York, The Century Company, 1906). The latest verse translation is Miss Jessie L. Weston's, in her *Romance, Vision, and Satire* (Boston and New York, 1912). The fullest and most exact conception of the content and import of the original, and of its descriptive beauty, may be had from Osgood's translation into modern prose (Princeton, N.J., 1907). Osgood's edition of the text, cited above, fully interprets the poem as an elegy, and discusses the different view of Schofield.

of the *Divine Comedy* is led into the light of heaven by his Beatrice lost on earth; the English poet is led by his lost child, his Pearl without spot, grown in the heavenly land to maidenhood. Teaching him her happiness, she gradually bows him to the divine will and the heavenly hope.

> Right as the moon in might doth rise
> Ere yet is driven down the day,
> So suddenly in a wondrous wise
> I beheld the heavenly array.
> This noble city of rich emprise,
> Unbidden, as aye the blest obey,
> Was full of virgins in the very guise
> Of her whose happiness I say.
> And crowned were all in the selfsame way,
> Apparelled in pearls and in weeds of white;
> Bound on their bosoms all display
> The blissful pearl with great delight.
>
> *Pearl*, stanza 92.

Yearning toward this vision, the poet struggles to cross the river — and awakes. But Paradise has taught him peace. The poem closes:

> To please the prince and be at peace with him is full easy for the good Christian. I have found him, day and night, a God, a Lord, a true Friend. Such as I have now told was the fortune that befell me at this mound, bowed in grief for my Pearl; and straightway I gave her up unto God in Christ's dear blessing and mine own — he whom in the form of bread and wine the priest showeth unto us each day. And now may Christ our Prince grant that we become servants of his own household, and precious pearls to delight him ever. Amen. (Osgood's translation.)

Our first elegy, this poem of the fourteenth century, has not only the beautiful dignity of verse which moves the great elegies of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth cen-

turies, but also much of the same attitude of mind toward the mystery of bereavement. There is no jar in passing from the reading of the *Pearl* to the reading of *In Memoriam*.

3. PIERS PLOWMAN[1] (LAST QUARTER OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY)

In a somer sesun, whan softe was the sonne,
I schop me into a schroud a scheep as I were;
In habite of an hermite vnholy of werkes
Wende I wydene in this world wondres to here.
Bote in a Mayes morwnynge on Maluerne hulles
Me bifel a ferly, a feyrie me thouhte.
I was weori of wandringe and wente me to reste
Vndur a brod banke bi a bourne syde;
And as I lay and leonede and lokede on the watres,
I slumberde in a slepynge, hit sownede so murie.
Thenne gon I meeten a meruelous sweuene
That I was in a wildernesse, wuste I neuer where;
And as I beheold into the est anheiȝ to the sonne,
I sauh a tour on a toft triȝely imaket,
A deop dale bineothe, a dungun therinne,
With deop dich and derk and dredful of siht.
A feir feld ful of folk fond I ther bitwene,
Of alle maner of men, the mene and the riche,
Worchinge and wondringe as the world asketh.[2]

Piers the Plowman, A text, Prologue, 1–19.

[1] Edited in three parallel texts by W. W. Skeat (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1886), and in a single small volume with notes and glossary by the same editor (4th edition, revised, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1886).

[2] In a summer season, when soft was the sun, I put me into a garment as if I were a shepherd; in habit of an hermit unholy of works went I wide in this world wonders to hear. But in a May morning on Malvern hills me befell a marvel, a faery methought. I was weary of wandering, and went to rest me under a broad bank by a burn's side; and as I lay and leaned and looked on the waters, I slumbered in a sleeping, it sounded so merry. Then did I dream a marvellous dream, that I was

To dream in the May fields is so common among medieval poets as to be hardly more than conventional introduction, a poetic fiction. For the dream figures imagined by the medieval poets, far from being like the shapes of real dreams, are personifications of virtues or vices, of institutions or tendencies. In the feigned dream these abstractions take shape, and talk to the poet or to one another. Such personification is called allegory. The type of medieval allegory, indeed the mainspring of this literary movement, is the French *Roman de la Rose*, in which the rose-lady is love, and the story, so to call it, is of how love is finally won. The *Roman de la Rose*[1] was begun by one man (Guillaume de Lorris, writing 4070 lines between 1200 and 1230) and finished by another (Jean de Meun, writing 18,002 lines between 1270 and 1282). But though the continuator uses the allegory more satirically than the beginner, both use the same sort of figures: Lady Gladness, Fair-seeming, Courtesy, Sweet-thought, Danger, Shame, Evil-mouth, etc. Cold and artificial as such fiction seems to us now, we must remember, not only that it was an accepted form in the middle age, but also that it made a great appeal in the seventeenth century. Allegory no longer seems necessarily dull when we remember the *Pilgrim's Progress*. And in medieval England allegory was touched by genius in much the same way. A group of alliterative allegorical poems clustering about the central figure of *Piers the Plowman*, type of

in a wilderness, wiste I never where; and as I beheld into the east, upward to the sun, I saw a tower on a toft squarely made, a deep dale beneath, a dungeon therein, with deep ditch and dark and dreadful of sight. A fair field full of folk found I there-between, of all manner of men, the mean and the rich, working and wandering as the world asketh.

[1] There is a translation into modern English verse by F. S. Ellis in *Temple Classics*.

the honest laborer, is attributed to William Langland. We do not know who William Langland was, nor even whether the successive expansions of the *Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman* are the work of a single man; but these successive and varying forms, whoever wrote them, are full of interest, and the first form [1] is evidently the work of genius. It is this earliest and shortest form of the vision that is discussed here. The prologue goes on from the beginning quoted above to describe vividly the various people on this "fair field" the earth. Pilgrims, for instance, — [2]

Pilgrims and palmers pledged themselves together
For to seek Saint James and saints at Rome;
Went they forth on their way with many wise tales,
And had the leave to lie all their lives after.
Hermits in a heap with hookéd staves
Went on to Walsingham and their wenches after.
Great lubbers and long that loth were to swink
Clothed themselves in capes, to be known for friars.

. . . . . .

There preached a pardoner as he a priest were,
And brought up a bull with bishops' seals,
And said that himself might absolve them all
Of falseness and fasting and of vows that were broken.
Unlearned men liked him well and believed his speech,
And came up cowering and kissed his bull.
He banged them with his brevet and bleared all their eyes.

. . . . . .

[1] Known as the A text; translated, in her *Romance, Vision, and Satire* (Boston and New York, 1912) by Miss Jessie L. Weston, who adds a translation of part of the B text. The B text is translated entire in Everyman's Library.

[2] From here on, the quotations are rendered in slightly modernized form keeping the sentence-habit, the alliteration, and, in general, the rhythm of the original.

Ditchers and delvers that do their deeds ill
And drive forth the long day with "*Dieu vous sauve, dame Emma.*"
Cooks and their scullions cry their "Hot pies, hot!
Good geese and pigs! Go we dine, go!"
Taverners to them told the same tale,
With "Good wine of Gascony and wine of Alsace,
Of Rhine and of Rochelle, the roast to digest."
All this I saw sleeping and seven times more.

A text, Prologue, 46–53, 65–71, 102–109.

Piers the Plowman is marked off at once from the common habit of medieval allegory by such characterization. These are real people, — types, to be sure, and described very briefly, but flashed upon us as individuals. It is the same quality that gives vividness to the *Pilgrim's Progress*, the realization of the persons of the allegory as men and women. For even as the pardoner is not merely typical of his class, but stands out as an individual, so do the abstract qualities and institutions. Of these latter the first is Holy Church:

What this mountain meaneth, and this darksome dale,
And this fair field full of folk, fairly I shall show you.
A lady lovely of look in linen apparelled
Came adown from the cliff and called me fairly
And said: "Son, sleepest thou? Seest thou this people,
How busy they be about the maze?
The most part of the people that are passing now on earth
Have their worship in this world; care they for no better.
Of other heaven than here hold they no account."
I was afraid of her face, though she fair were,
And said "*Merci, ma dame*, what is this to mean?"
"This tower and this toft," quoth she, "Truth is therein;
And would that ye wrought as his word teacheth."

A text, I, 1–13.

Truth, says the lady, is the guide to conduct. The dungeon in the deep dale is the castle of Care. "And who," asks the dreamer, "are you?"

"Holy Church I am," quoth she; thou oughtest me to know.
I fostered thee first and thy faith taught thee.
Thou broughtest me bondsmen my bidding to work
And to love me loyally while thy life endured."
Then kneeled I on my knees and cried her of grace.

A text, I, 73–77.

In answer Holy Church says, "When all treasure is tried, truth is the best," shows how this works out in humility, and goes on:

"For though ye be true of tongue and true in your winning,
And eke as chaste as a child that in church weepeth,
Unless ye live truly and also love the poor,
And such goods as God sends truly divide,
Ye have no more merit in Mass or in hours.
. . . . . .
For James the gentle bound it in his book
That faith without fruit is feebler than naught,
And dead as a door-nail, unless the deed follow."
. . . . . .
Yet kneeled I on my knees and cried her of grace
And said "*Merci, madame*, for Mary's love, of heaven,
That bare the blissful Bairn that bought us on the rood,
Teach me the true way for to tell the false."
"Look on thy left hand," quoth she "and see where he standeth,
Both False and Favel and all his whole crew."
I looked on the left hand as the lady told me;
Then was I ware of a woman wondrously apparelled,
Fair with all her furs, the richest upon earth,
Crowned with a crown — the king hath no better.
All her five fingers were fettered with gems
Picked of the preciousest that prince ever wore.

In red scarlet she rode, be-ribboned with gold.

. . . . . .

"What is this woman," quoth I, "thus wondrously attired?"
"That is Meed the maiden," quoth she, "that hath me marred full often!"

A text, I, 153–161; II, 1–16.

Lady Meed is presented, not only thus by her looks, but also by her speech and actions. She is made to characterize herself, like a person in a play. With the aid of Simony and Favel, she is to be married to False; but, their project being scented, they are forced to carry the case before the king. Thereupon all the lying crew flee except Lady Meed herself, who is much courted by the justices, and shriven by a venal confessor on her promise to put a window in his church. She intercedes with the mayor to wink at the oppression of the poor by landlords and tradesmen. The king proposing to marry her to Conscience, she professes willingness; but Conscience refuses in an arraignment of her and all her works, and adds a stout rebuttal to her meek and crafty defence.

"Cease now," said the king; "I suffer you no more.
Ye shall assent, forsooth, and serve me both.
Kiss her," quoth the king. "Conscience, I bid thee."
"Nay, by Christ," quoth Conscience; "congé me rather.
Unless Reason rede me thereto, rather will I die!"

A text, IV, 1–5.

Reason, being fetched to court, sees justice done in a suit against Wrong, in spite of the intercession of Lady Meed, and undertakes to rule the realm.

"By Him that reached on the rood," quoth Reason to the king,
"But I rule thus thy realm, rend out my ribs,
If it be so that Buxomness be at mine assent."
"I assent," quoth the king, "by Saint Mary my Lady,
Once my counsel is come of clerks and of earls.

But readily, Reason, thou ridest not hence;
For as long as I live let thee I will not."
"I am ready," quoth Reason, "to rest with thee ever.
So that Conscience be our counselor, care I for no better."
"I grant gladly," quoth the king. "God forbid that he fail.
And as long as I live let us bide together."

A text, IV, 148–158.

Thus ends the first vision. In the second, which follows immediately, Conscience comes with a cross to preach repentance. Pernel Proudheart is smitten with contrition. Envy and Covetousness and the other deadly sins as they come to confession are characterized quite as clearly by their own words as the people of early Elizabethan drama. Most dramatic of all is the episode of Gluttony:

Now beginneth the Glutton for to go to shrift.
His course is to church-ward his shrift for to tell.
Then Betty the brewster bade him good morrow,
And straightway she asked of him whither he would.
"To holy church," quoth he, "for to hear Mass;
And straightway I shall be shriven, and sin no more."
"I have good ale, gossip," quoth she. "Glutton, wilt thou assay?"
"Hast thou aught i' thy purse," quoth he, "any hot spices?"
"Yea, Glutton, gossip," quoth she, "God wot, full good.
I have pepper and peony and a pound of garlic,
A farthing-worth of fennel-seed for these fasting days."
Then goeth Glutton in, and great oaths after.
Cissy the souter's wife sat on the bench.
Wat the warrener and his wife too,
Tomkin the tinker and two of his helpers,
Hick the hackney-man, and Hodge the needler,
Clarice of Cock Lane and the clerk of the church,
Sir Pierce of Pridie and Pernel of Flanders,
Davy the ditcher and a dozen other,

A rebeck-player, a rat-catcher, a raker from Cheapside,
A rope-maker, a riding-man, and Rose the disher,
Godfrey of Garlickhithe and Griffin the Welshman,
Second-hand men a heap, — early in the morning
Give Glutton with good will good ale to handsel.

. . . . . .

There was laughing and leering and "Let go the cup."
Bargains and beverages began to arise;
And they sat so till evensong, and sang now and then,
Till Glutton had gulped a gallon and a gill.

. . . . . .

He had no strength to stand till he his staff had.
Then began he for to go like a gleeman's dog,
Sometimes aside and sometimes aback,
As he that sets a snare to seize birds with.
When he drew to the door, then dimmed his eyes;
And athwart the threshold he was thrown to the ground.
Clement the cobbler caught Glutton by the middle,
And for to lift him aloft laid him on his knees;
And Glutton was a great churl and grim in the lifting.

. . . . . .

With all the woe of this world his wife and his daughter
Bare him home to his bed and brought him therein.
And after all this surfeit such an access he had
That he slept Saturday and Sunday till sun was going to rest.
Then he wakened from his wink, and wiped his eyes.
The first word that he spake was "Where is the cup?"
His wife warned him then of wickedness and of sin.
Then was he rueful, the rascal, and rubbed his ears;
Began to groan grimly and great dole to make
For his wicked life that he so long had lived.
"For hunger or for thirst, I make here mine oath,
On Friday not even fish shall fill my maw,
Ere Abstinence, mine aunt, have given me leave.
And yet have I hated her all my lifetime."

A text, V, 146–221.

We must go to Falstaff's cronies at the Boar's Head in this same London neighborhood to find a company of folk from the city streets comparable to this in concise force of rendering.

Force, not beauty; for evidently the poet of *Piers the Plowman* has no such thought of beauty as the poet of *Gawain* and *Pearl*. Vision he has; he makes us see what he saw. The conventional vision form made popular by the *Roman de la Rose* he animates with dramatic power. But he wished men, imagining these people, to be moved with the evil and the aspiration of the time. He would make them cry out, like Christian in Bunyan's allegory, "What shall I do?" He is a moralist, a reformer, a preacher. His story, with all its pictures, is to stir men's souls.

> A thousand of men then thronged all together,
> Weeping and wailing for their wicked deeds,
> Crying upward to Christ and to His clean Mother
> To have grace to seek for Saint Truth. God grant they so may!
>
> A text, V, 260–263.

The throng asks guidance of a palmer fresh from the Holy Land; but he has never heard of Saint Truth. Then suddenly appears the Plowman, the honest and faithful laborer who can show men how to live.

> "Peter," quoth a plowman, and put forth his head.
> "I know him as naturally as a student his books.
> Clean conscience and wit kenned me to his dwelling,
> And did ensure me straightway to serve him forever.
> Both to sow and to set while I swink might,
> I have been his fellow this fifteen winter."
>
> A text, VI, 28–33.

So the Plowman becomes their guide to Saint Truth. But first he teaches them to work, each in his station.

"That were a long letting," quoth a lady in a veil.
"What shall we women be working the while?"
"Some shall sew the sacking for saving of wheat;
And ye women that have wool work at it fast;
Spin it all speedily; spare not your fingers,
But if it be holyday or else be holy even.
Look over your linen and labor thereon fast.
The needy and the naked, take note how they lie,
And cast on them clothes for cold; for so would Truth."

A text, VII, 7–15.

The knight, who wishes to lend a hand, is told that his office is to defend the laborers. The idle and the malingerers, on the other hand, have to be goaded to their stint by Hunger. So the Plowman teaches them to work out their salvation.

Therefore I counsel all Christians to cry Christ mercy,
And Mary His Mother, to be mean between,
That God give us grace, ere we go hence,
Such works to work while that we are here
That after our death-day Do-well rehearse
That at the day of doom we did as he bade us.

A text, VIII, 182–187.

Simple enough in its main lines, the story is not always easy to follow in detail. The allegorical persons are more distinct than the allegory itself. The poet evidently cared less for the consistency of his literary form than for his message. The vitality of this message and the vividness of its preaching were enough to fix the Plowman as a proverbial figure in English literature. He appears in Chaucer. He was turned by later reformers to their own purposes. We read again and again of the Plowman, until he is superseded by Bunyan's Pilgrim.

The verse of this fervid allegory is a return to the staves of Old English poetry (page 23). The other alliterative poems that we have been studying (page 139) were a literary

revival, the work of poets familiar also with French rime and French stanza-forms; but the poet of *Piers Plowman* seems simply to resume a native inheritance never quite forgotten by the common people. Though he has no such artistic shaping as Cynewulf (page 50), though indeed he lapses into monotony, false stress, and looseness of handling, he keeps the essential character of the old verse. That, perhaps, is why his sentences are cruder and more abrupt than the best habit of his time; for the old verse belongs to the period of simple parallel structure with little subordination, one idea or image being simply added to another. In verse and sentence-form *Piers Plowman* is essentially Old English.

And it is quite as English in its tone and point of view. The zeal of the poet is a sober earnestness. His common-sense is as strong as his sense of law and order. Faithful son of Church and State, he pleads for reform, not for revolution. By Bunyan's time, hundreds of the common people had broken with both Church and State. For him as for them salvation lay with the individual. But the poet of *Piers Plowman* keeps the great principle of obedience. In other respects the earlier and the later allegory are strikingly alike, most of all in that concrete vividness and homely force which are the salt of English literature. Both are full of homely proverbs; both have that popular style which is the oral habit of the preacher. Both are English in the same ways; but *Piers Plowman* is also medieval.[1]

[1] For further study see J. M. Manly, *Piers the Plowman and its Sequence* in the Cambridge History of English Literature, volume II, page 1 (separately reprinted for the Early English Text Society); J. J. Jusserand, *L'Épopée Mystique de William Langland* (Paris, 1893; translated, with the author's revision and enlargement, by M. E. R., as *Piers Plowman, a contribution to the history of English mysticism*, New York and London, 1894). See also Jusserand's reply to Manly in *Modern Philology*, 6. 271, 7. 289.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAUCER[1]

EVERY great author inherits as his literary birthright all the literature of the past and especially all the literary achievements of his own people. Without this he could never become what he is destined to become; but without him the literature of his country could never become what it is destined to become. For the greatness of an author is the power to realize what his inheritance is worth and by the expressive force of his personality to make it worth more. As an Englishman or a Frenchman he thinks the thoughts and feels the feelings of his race; but he is more than an Englishman or a Frenchman; he is a genius. He has in highest degree the power of expression; for while he expresses his people he expresses himself. Minor authors continue to do, more or less well, what has been done before. They follow the literary forms of the time. A great author born in the same conditions, by some addition or change which he alone of his time has the intuition to discern and the art to apply, gives the old forms new worth, or creates new forms. At once the

[1] The best general guide is R. K. Root's *The Poetry of Chaucer* (Boston, 1906), which is also suggestive for English medieval literature as a whole. See also Miss E. P. Hammond's *Chaucer, a Bibliographical Manual* (New York, 1908), and T. R. Lounsbury's *Studies in Chaucer* (3 volumes, New York, 1892). The standard edition is W. W. Skeat's (7 volumes, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1894–1897). There is a complete one-volume edition by the same editor and publisher, and another edited by Pollard, Heath, Liddell, and McCormick (Globe Edition, Macmillan, 1903).

literature of his country is enriched as it could not be by generations of lesser authors. The new generation, seeing by a new light, learns its art of him. Greek drama might have lingered in a long infancy but for Æschylus; it could never have become a model of dramatic form but for Sophocles; it could never have remained vital in modern times but for Euripides. As we look back, we measure its progress by those three great names. There was a strong English drama before Shakespeare, uncertain of its art, extravagant, but full of promise. Shakespeare came, and the promise was fulfilled as it could not have been fulfilled otherwise. At once English drama became great, because he discerned and applied what could not have been discerned, much less applied, by any lesser author.

So in coming to the work of the first great English author we rise at once to a higher literary level. We have seen the truth expressed in medieval forms of beauty by many minor authors. It was characteristic, indeed, of the age of romance to express itself in common, almost universal forms (page 70), not by great individuals, but by many unknown authors working much alike. The first great English author is Chaucer. English literature before him we must know in order to comprehend him fully; but so soon as we read him we find it all transfigured. We see its possibilities because they are suddenly realized by his genius. He summed up the best of medieval English literature, enhanced it by his own great art, enriched it by interpreting the new literature of Italy, and carried it forward into the new current of the Renaissance.

Of the outward life of Chaucer, as of the outward life of Shakespeare, we know after much research few facts; and of these still fewer have any direct literary significance. The life of a man of letters used not to be thought of as having

public interest. Biography was supposed to be concerned rather with men of action. And this idea, in spite of our modern curiosity, is sound. Men of action are revealed in their deeds; men of letters are revealed, better than by any other means they can be revealed, by their writings. Their real biographies are their books. Thus we know Chaucer very well, better than we know most men of modern times, better than we know any other man of his own time, though we are not certain when he was born, nor even exactly when his poems saw the light. In fact, the substance of the external events of his life can be put into the end of this paragraph. He lived from 1340 to 1400. Usually in circumstances of comfort, though without wealth, he was sufficiently in favor at court to receive a pension, to be a comptroller of customs at London and secretary of two commissions for public works, and to be envoy on one occasion to Flanders and France and on two other occasions to Italy. In his youth he served in the army against the French. In middle life he was a member of Parliament. His wife Philippa was probably the sister-in-law of his patron John of Gaunt. He knew the court and court ways in both England and France, without, apparently, taking time to advance as a courtier. As much might be said of twenty unknown men of his time. We know Chaucer in the only way in which the greater authors generally have cared to be known.

Facts more important than these, the facts of his publication and his reading, are generally supplied by his works. All we need further in the way of fact is some knowledge of the literary conditions of his time. Publication in our modern sense there was none. So long as copies were still made laboriously by hand, circulation was very slow and very limited. Authors wrote for few readers; they had to depend largely for the spread of their works on patrons in positions

of influence; and they were never certain that any two copies would be exactly alike. Many books were written in the middle age; but only the most popular of them were circulated in many copies, and sometimes the more copies, the more variations there were from the original. How authors were at the mercy of the scriveners, or copyists, is set forth in Chaucer's humorous protest to one Adam:

> Adam scriveyn, if ever it thee bifalle
> *Boece* or *Troilus* to wryten newe,
> Under thy lokkes thou most have the scalle,
> But after my making thou wryte trewe.
> So oft a daye I mot thy werke renewe,
> Hit to correcte and eek to rubbe and scrape;
> And al is through thy negligence and rape.

A good deal of modern expert skill has been spent in restoring the original texts of medieval authors by comparing various manuscripts.

1. A MEDIEVAL AUTHOR'S READING

If the books that a medieval author wrote were thus scarce, dear, and inaccurate, so often were the books that he read. The change wrought in this respect by the printing press is too great for us to realize without a strong effort of imagination. In Chaucer's time a book was a precious possession. He expresses his Clerk of Oxford's devotion to learning by saying:

> For him was lever have at his beddes heed
> Twenty bokes, clad in blak or reed,
> Of Aristotle and his philosophye
> Than robes riche, or fithele, or gay sautrye.
>
> *Canterbury Tales, Prologue*, 293–296.[1]

[1] References by line in this chapter are to Skeat's seven-volume edition of the *Works*.

In our time to say that a student had rather have twenty books than their value in clothes or musical instruments does not suggest extraordinary expenditure on either; but in Chaucer's time twenty books were a considerable collection, such as would not often be seen outside of the monastic and cathedral libraries. Richard de Bury, Bishop of Durham, author of the *Philobiblon* (i.e., *Booklover*, 1344), had probably the largest private collection of this time. "He collected," says Adam Murimuth, "an infinite number of books, as well through gifts as through exchange of favors with various monasteries and through purchase.[1]" And the bishop himself devotes a chapter to enlarging upon his unusual opportunities for collecting, through his offices at court, his embassies to Rome and to Paris, his learned friends, the travelling friars, and finally through his own staff of "binders, correctors, illuminators, and generally of all who could usefully labor in the service of books."[2] Yet this "infinite number" of books was somewhat more than five cartloads,[3] hardly enough to be called a large private library today. Nor were even the libraries of cathedrals and monasteries either large or accessible according to our modern habits. Richard de Bury thought no layman could be trusted to use books, since even the clerks of his time were capable of defiling them with crumbs of lunch, or dirty fingers, or straws stuck in for bookmarks.[4] If even young clerks knew no more about the use of books, what must be thought of the reading habits of the time? Adding to the situation the slowness and difficulty of travel, one begins to realize that in the middle age wide reading was easy in only a few centers, and that even in these a man must sometimes have studied

[1] *The Philobiblon of Richard de Bury*, edited and translated by Ernest C. Thomas, London, 1888, page xlvii.

[2] Page 206. [3] Page xlvii. [4] Chapter xvii.

not so much what he wanted as what he could get.[1] The medieval formula of citation is "my author says," or "the book says." Lucky he who could for any given point consult more than one.

In proportion as we visualize these conditions we can realize how research must often have been baffled, why medieval notions of history are often imperfect, and why even scholars, to say nothing of men of letters, were often inaccurate. We can see, too, why compends, or digests of knowledge, such as Florus's epitome of Roman history, or Orosius's of universal history, were better known than the greater books from which they were drawn. *Cursor Mundi*,[2] a huge fourteenth-century English compend, versified history for common English readers in seven divisions: (1) from the Creation to Noah, (2) from the Flood to the Confusion of Tongues, (3) from Abraham to the death of Saul, (4) from David to the Captivity, (5) from the Parentage of the Virgin to the Baptist, (6) from the Baptism of Christ to the "Invention" of the Cross, (7) Doomsday and after. Some of the sources of this compend are themselves compends, especially the *Historia Scholastica* of Petrus Comestor (twelfth century). The *Polychronicon* of Ralph Higden (died 1364) wove with sacred history secular history, even some geography, and brought all down to the writer's own time. The most ambitious of the medieval compends was the *Speculum Majus sive Bibliotheca Mundi* of Vincent of Beauvais (thirteenth century), "The Greater Mirror, or Library of the World." It is divided into: I. *Speculum Naturale*, The Mirror of

[1] Lounsbury's ample discussion of the learning of Chaucer (*Studies in Chaucer*, II, chapter v) has been used largely in this section.

[2] Edited by R. Morris (London, 1874, etc., Early English Text Society). For a summary, see Morley's *English Writers*, IV, 124; and for the *Polychronicon*, IV, 242.

Nature; II. *Doctrinale*, of Theology; III. *Historiale*, of history, to which Chaucer refers as "the storial mirour." A cyclopedia in scope, this vast digest is far from cyclopedic in either accuracy or system. It is like the other medieval compends in rather collecting knowledge than classifying it, and in making large use of simple narrative.

Though Latin, as the universal language of learning, was usually the language of these compends, there was no correspondingly general knowledge of the great Latin classics. Cicero was known mainly through the *Somnium Scipionis*, a part of his *De Republica* commented by the fifth-century grammarian Macrobius, not through his greater essays, orations, and letters. Vergil was known better, though sometimes interpreted mystically and sometimes regarded as an astrologer. Some late Latin authors, Statius for example, and even some authors of the early middle age, were more current than Livy or Tacitus. Far the greatest Latin literary influence was that of the poet Ovid, who was more widely known and used in the middle age than any other Latin author.

Greek literature was known very little except through translations and summaries. Instead of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, medieval readers had the barren Latin histories of Troy fabricated over the names of Dares and Dictys. The great Greek historians and dramatists could be read only by a rare scholar here and there. Plato's influence was transmitted indirectly through the later philosophies derived from his. The main Greek influence on the middle age was that of Aristotle; but this, again, was spread indirectly through Latin summaries and through the preservation of his ideas among the Arabs of Spain. The Aristotle cited so often by medieval writers is an Aristotle much changed, and sometimes perverted, by centuries of indirect transmission without reference to the original.

In the English literature of Chaucer's time the most pervasive foreign influences were still French; and French influence was, above all, that of the *Roman de la Rose* (page 178). But a later literary influence had already taken hold; and its increase was due partly to Chaucer himself. This is the influence from Italy. Unquestionably the greatest literary work of the middle age is the *Divina Commedia* of Dante (1300), the epic of hell, purgatory, and paradise. The grandeur of this poem is so unique that it compelled rather admiration than imitation. More definite in its effect on English literary art is the narrative, both prose and verse, of Boccaccio. A third great Italian, Petrarch, though Chaucer knew his works, had his main effect on English writing later.

Chaucer's reading in these books of his time was somewhat like the reading of a playwright today. He was not a scholar; but he had so quick an interest in what educated people were thinking and talking about that he picked up some medicine, some astronomy, and a good deal of philosophy, besides laying by great store of tales. The knowledge that he shows in his writing is mainly knowledge of human nature as he has seen it, not as he has read about it; but the point of view of this wonderful observation, and its interpretation of motive, were often directed by his reading. His satire shows clearly the mark of Jean de Meun (page 178). Part of the extant medieval English version of the *Roman de la Rose* seems to be his; and certainly his intimate knowledge of this poem colored the humor of his presentation of typical men and women. He was even fonder of another book, also very popular in his time, Boethius *on the Consolation of Philosophy*.[1] This noble book too he translated; and

[1] There is a modern English translation of Boethius, by W. V. Cooper, in *Temple Classics*.

it colored his view of life even more deeply. The moralizing that crops out in his narrative sounds less often like the Christian religion than like the philosophy of Boethius. This is far from implying a rejection of Christian theology; for Boethius, whether actually Christian or pagan, was thought of and interpreted by medieval writers as Christian. Chaucer preferred philosophy partly because he had none of Langland's zeal for reform. His work is to represent men as he sees them, not to convert them. He shows none of the passion for holiness. The sublimity of Dante seems rather to compel the admiration of the artist than to touch the soul of the man. As a man thinking on the meaning of life he prefers the companionship of Boethius.

2. CHAUCER'S IMITATION AND ADAPTATION: THE MINOR POEMS

In studying how Chaucer's reading worked out in his writing we must remember that if the books kept by a medieval author "at his bed's head" had marked literary traits, he was more likely to catch these traits than a modern author is to catch a particular style while he is reading many. In the middle age the influence of a single book on another single book was larger than in our day of miscellaneous reading. One book in ten stands out in memory more distinctly than one book in a hundred. The author whose intellectual life was nourished mainly by ten books would almost know them by heart, and would show almost inevitably in his own work strong marks of their conceptions and their methods. If he had genius, he would still, of course, be original; but even the originality of Chaucer did not preclude a kind of imitation far more common in the middle age than now.

Such imitation is most obvious, of course, in his earlier work. It was one of his ways of learning his own art. Boe-

thius he did not imitate; for he did not write essays. But, besides translating, he took from the French certain literary methods. Thus one of his early love poems, the *Complaint to Pity*, is conventionally French. Its character will be clear from the second stanza:

> And when that I, by lengthe of certeyn yeres,
> Had ever in oon a tyme sought to speke,
> To Pite ran I, al bespreynt with teres,
> To preyen hir on Crueltee me awreke.
> But, ere I might with any worde outbreke,
> Or tellen any of my peynes smerte,
> I fond hir deed and buried in an herte.

This stanza (ababbcc), used also in the *Compleynt to Adam* quoted above, is known as the rime-royal. The personification is purely conventional; nor does the poem reach anywhere the directness of sincere passion. But it does show that Chaucer had already learned from the French smooth handling of the stanza. The *complaint* was a regular French lyric form used by Chaucer at various times in other short poems, *The Complaint of Mars*, *The Complaint of Venus*, *A Complaint to His Lady*, etc., never with much lyric fervor, but always with that metrical skill and that elegance of phrase which characterize the French model. *The Complaint of Venus* is a free translation; the others, so far as we know, are imitations. A more elaborate French stanza, the roundel, appears in *Merciless Beauty* (abbababababbabb, with incremental refrain). This is a triple roundel, of which the first part is:

> Your ÿen two wol slee me sodenly.
> I may the beautè of hem not sustene,
> So woundeth hit throughout my herte kene.

And but your word wol helen hastily
My hertes wounde whyl that hit is grene,
Your ijen two wol slee me sodenly.
I may the beautè of hem not sustene.

Upon my trouthe I say you feithfully
That ye ben of my lyf and deeth the quene;
For with my deeth the trouthe shall be sene.
Your ijen two wol slee me sodenly.
I may the beautè of hem not sustene,
So woundeth hit throughout my herte kene.

The unfinished *Anelida and Arcite* shows another sort of borrowing. Stanzas 1, 2, and 3, the prelude, are taken from Boccaccio's *Teseide;* 4–7, from the *Thebais* of Statius; 8–10, from the *Teseide* again. Yet all is woven smoothly. After twenty-seven stanzas of narrative there is introduced a *complaint* of Anelida to Arcite in elaborate stanzas of strophe and antistrophe. The dignity of *Anelida,* fragment though it is, shows that Chaucer, still using models freely as a matter of course, was no longer controlled. He was finding his own art of verse. And his maturity is still plainer in *The Former Age,* which borrows its idea and some eighteen or twenty lines from Boethius, but develops the conception independently into a poem of sixty-four lines. In the second book of Boethius the fifth meter (the sections of the *Consolation of Philosophy* are alternately prose and verse) begins *Felix nimium prior etas.* Chaucer's translation begins:

Blisful was the first age of men! They helden him apayed with the metes that the trewe feldes broughten fourth. They ne distroyede nor deceivede nat hemself with outrage. They weren wont lightly to slaken hir hunger at even with acornes of okes. They ne coude nat medly the yifte of Bachus to the cleer hony.

Chaucer's *Translation of Boethius,* Skeat's edition, *Works,* volume ii, page 40.

And Chaucer's *Former Age* has for its first stanza:

> A blisful lyf, a paisible and a swete,
> Ledden the peples in the former age.
> They helde hem payed of fruites that they ete,
> Which that the feldes yave hem by usage.
> They ne were nat forpampred with outrage.
> Unknowen was the quern and eek the melle.
> They eten mast, hawes, and swich pounage,
> And dronken water of the colde welle.

This is little more than versification — and very smooth and sweet verse it is — of Boethius. But the second stanza develops the idea without any specific reference to Boethius.

> Yit nas the ground nat wounded with the plough,
> But corn upsprong, unsowe of mannes hond,
> The which they gniden, and eete half ynough.
> No man yit knew the forwes of his lond;
> No man the fyr out of the flint yit fond.
> Unkorven and ungrobbed lay the vyne.
> No man yit in the morter spyces grond
> To clarrè, ne to sause of galantyne.

The third, fourth, and sixth stanzas owe to the original certain lines; the fifth, seventh, and eighth, like the second, are independent. Thus the poem as a whole has much originality. Borrowing the idea and even many of the phrases, Chaucer transposed, amplified, and heightened in his own way. He touched with genius a method of borrowing very common in the middle age.

Two longer minor poems show substantially the same sort of composition as *Anelida* and *The Former Age*. Both seem to be occasional poems, composed, that is, on the occasion of certain happenings at court. *The Book of the Duchess* (1369) commemorates in a sort of elegy the death of the Lady Blanche, first wife of John of Gaunt. Cast in the

conventional French form of a dream-vision (page 178), and including a pretty metrical imitation of Ovid's *Ceyx and Alcyone*, it shows little of Chaucer's powers except a touch or two of dramatic dialogue. *The Parliament of Birds* (about 1382) celebrates the marriage of King Richard to Anne of Bohemia. The form of this poem too is the French dream-vision. It includes a summary of the *Somnium Scipionis* of Cicero, and takes a hint from the *De Planctu Naturæ* of Alanus de Insulis[1] (twelfth century). It is indebted to Dante and to Boccaccio. Yet, for all this borrowing, it shows a larger and more mature originality, both in the lively dramatic dialogue of the symbolic birds and in the richness and dignity of the verse.

3. CHAUCER'S CREATION OF CHARACTERS: THE TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

The Parliament of Birds may be taken as marking the close of Chaucer's prentice years. Not that he ceased to imitate; some of the short poems already cited are probably of later date; but that he was secure in his own art. He had learned from the French the popular conventions, the skill of the stanza, and the ease and finish of courtly poetry. He knew enough of the court on either side of the Channel to turn verses that would please the French poet Deschamps and to enjoy in turn the verses of Machault. And on these prentice years the dominant influence was French. That he knew the French romances would go without saying, even if it were not plain from some of his own stories; but he was too original and too satirical to become a link in the long chain of romancers. He had translated largely from

[1] See *The Complaint of Nature* by Alain de Lille, translated from the Latin by Douglas M. Moffat (New York, 1908; Yale Studies in English, xxxvi).

French and Latin. He had imitated skilfully, with many a touch of his own. He had learned further to adapt, to recombine originally, and finally to work out hints from his reading in ways of his own. He was ready to do his own work. He was ready, instead of following a school, to make one.

The stimulus for his mature work came from the strong new literature of Italy. Chaucer was an envoy to Italy in 1372–1373, and again in 1378. In our time one may know Italian literature well without ever seeing Italy; in Chaucer's time it was not so. There were few Italian books in England; and Chaucer was one of the few English authors who could read them. French literature was the common property of men of letters on both sides of the Channel; Italian literature was new. The *Divina Commedia*, the first great work in Italian, was finished only some thirty years before Chaucer was born. Boccaccio and Petrarch, writing in his own time, wrote some of their works in Latin, uncertain whether the vulgar tongue had full literary capacity. Very likely Chaucer brought back from his journeys to Italy some Italian books. Certainly the journeys gave him a strong new literary stimulus.

The Italian author that affected him most, quite naturally, was that great teller of tales, Boccaccio. Dante, indeed, had new things to show him of the range, and especially the height of verse, besides giving him a line here and there, in two or three places a stanza. His *House of Fame* owes something to Dante for a narrative method different from that of the conventional French dream-vision. But the spirit and habitual mood of Dante were too far from Chaucer's to permit stronger influence. Petrarch gave him rather general ideas than literary method. Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, the tale of patient Griselda, is from Petrarch's Latin, and there is a sonnet of Petrarch's in *Troilus and Cressida;* but these

are translations, not imitations. If Chaucer's thought was affected by Petrarch's, especially by that conception of literature as the artistic product of individual genius which was new to the middle age, his style was affected hardly at all. The English disciples of Petrarch came later. To Chaucer Italian literature meant primarily Boccaccio.

Not Boccaccio's greatest work, the *Decameron*, was most used by Chaucer, but several volumes of his Latin prose and his two long Italian poems, the *Teseide* and the *Filostrato*. Chaucer's working over of the *Filostrato* into his own essentially different and highly original *Troilus and Cressida* (about 1380) shows, not only the height of his literary art, but its method. The history of how the material came to Boccaccio, how it was used by him, and what his version suggested to Chaucer, shows on the one hand the ordinary medieval habit, and on the other hand the power of genius to transform. Before it reached Boccaccio, the story of Troilus had already passed, in the medieval way of transmission (pages 71, 74) through several stages. So popular were romances of the Trojan war that there was a Troy cycle just as there was a cycle of Alexander, of Charlemagne, and of Arthur (pages 75, 82). Indeed, the romantic handling of the Troy legends may be said to have begun with the *Æneid*. Vergil magnifies one incident of the legends, suppresses another, invents a third, inserts bits of history, changes the scene, — all for the patriotic purpose of elaborating and enhancing the tradition that Trojan heroes were the ancestors of Rome. His Æneas and Turnus, and especially his romantic queen Dido, whether derived from Homer or from Ennius, from history or from legend, became in his vivid imagination new creatures, acting in scenes of his creation. And the combining of material so diverse into a unified whole is quite as much a work of creative origi-

nality as if every part of it had been invented. The Troy story was already old before Vergil; he made it new. Vergil's surpassing greatness was felt by the middle age rather vaguely. Writers who could not appreciate his art of composition could follow him to the extent of attaching the Trojan legends to their own countries. Thus the medieval Troy books brought descendants of the Trojan heroes to France or England, as the case required (see pages 78, 105). This mechanical extension of the legend indicates how crude was the composition. Their authors could copy Vergil's idea; they could not rise to his method.

But though the medieval Troy books are incomparably inferior to Vergil, Boccaccio and Chaucer are not. Neither of them, indeed, recast the whole legend; but both did for the same episode of it just what had been done before by Vergil; they reshaped originally. The episode that Boccaccio thus reconceived in his *Filostrato*, and Chaucer after him in his *Troilus and Cressida*, is a love story told by Benoît de Sainte-More in his *Roman de Troie* (between 1175 and 1200), and after him in Latin prose by Guido delle Colonne, of a youth and a maid barely hinted at in earlier versions. Cressida (Briseida she is called by Benoît) is separated from her Trojan lover Troilus by being restored to her father Calchas. In the Greek camp she is persuaded by Diomed to break her troth and become his mistress. Benoît's account of this is incidental and fragmentary, in seven different passages ranging from fifty to six hundred lines each, and so separated by intervening narrative of other things that the end comes nearly nine thousand lines after the beginning, though all the fragments added together make but fifteen hundred lines. Boccaccio, seeing material in these scattered fragments, made out of them a new love story of some fifty-five hundred lines called *Filostrato*. His Troilus (Troilo),

though he has been in love before, is carried away by love at first sight of Cressida (Griseida), as Romeo at first sight of Juliet. The tale tells how he woos her, wins her, is deserted by her for another, and breaks his heart at her faithlessness. All the earlier part is Boccaccio's invention. This includes a new character, Troilo's cousin Pandarus (Pandaro), a young gallant like himself, who finds means to bring the lovers together. But Boccaccio's originality appears still more in his giving the character of Troilo life, in making readers see him, like him, and sympathize with his sorrows. Griseida he makes far less distinct. He left her much as he found her in Benoît, the typical fair inconstant.

It was by making out of this woman one of the most charming and subtle personages of English fiction that Chaucer first showed the full power of his genius. He makes over the whole story, indeed, with masterly narrative method; but the form of the whole depends on his conception of this woman. He created Cressida (Criseyde), and made the story fit her. She is the central figure, the motive power, as Becky Sharp is of *Vanity Fair;* and the comparison is just, for Chaucer's vividness and delicacy of characterization turned a medieval romance into a novel. His Criseyde is winsome and weak, desirable and despicable, and always startlingly real. Out of the ordinary light o' love of the former versions he made a woman far more humanly interesting than Shakespeare's Cressida, drawn, indeed, with the same delicate sympathy of touch that gives life to Shakespeare's greater heroines. No reader but must hate her faithlessness; none but must be moved by that graciousness which survives her moral ruin. The heartbreak of Troilus and her own degradation alike work out in Chaucer's story inevitably from her character. She may be called the first great character of English fiction.

Though Chaucer knew Benoît's huge romance, he got his

inspiration from Boccaccio. The *Filostrato*[1] has 5512 lines. Of these Chaucer used 2730, or about half. But his *Troilus and Criseyde* has 8239 lines; that is, using half of Boccaccio's story, he made his own story half as long again as Boccaccio's whole. Of Chaucer's five books, the second and third, generally speaking, and the latter half of the first, are his own addition. These are the parts that describe the gradual and elaborate conquest of Criseyde. In Boccaccio's conception no such approach is necessary. His Griseida falls as easily into the arms of Troilo as later into the arms of Diomed. Chaucer's agent in the winning of the heroine is Pandarus. For this purpose he transforms Boccaccio's gay and facile Pandaro, cousin of Griseida, into a middle-aged uncle, shrewd, cynical, but covering his immorality by engaging frankness and wit. With these three main characters, the subtle Criseyde, the love-sick Troilus, and Pandarus the go-between, Chaucer builds up his story almost as if it were a drama.[2] The action rises with suspense and complication to the climax, Troilus's winning of Criseyde; it has its sharp dramatic reverse in her return to her father in exchange for a Trojan prisoner; it falls rapidly, through her yielding to the wooing of Diomed, to Troilus's despair and death. This latter part, which Boccaccio elaborates because his main figure is Troilus, Chaucer compresses for the same reason that made him expand the former part, because his main interest is in the character of Criseyde.

Chaucer's story turns upon Criseyde's moral weakness, her innate and inveterate faithlessness. Some critics have thought her an adventuress playing upon her lover and her uncle alike, laughing at their elaborate plans to gain

[1] Chaucer made some use also of the *Filocopo*.

[2] See T. R. Price in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, xi, 307–322 (1896).

what she all the while wished to give. The character is subtle enough to be read, as interesting people sometimes are in real life, more than one way. But rather she seems a woman who, though clever, was as little capable of singleness of purpose as of singleness of action. She lives in the moment, dominated by circumstances. At each successive crisis in the story she flinches and falls back on compromise. She lacks strength of will to resist the temptation of Pandarus, to face the consequences of her yielding, to choose love in spite of the world, and finally to keep her promise. But the tragedy would lose half its force if Criseyde were not as attractive as she is faithless; and the superiority of Chaucer's art consists largely in realizing her character on both sides, or rather on all sides. The *Filostrato* is a different and an inferior story because Griseida is an inferior woman. We sympathize more with Chaucer's Troilus because he has lost more; and Criseyde, though she never has our respect, continues to hold our interest.

Much of the charm of Chaucer's story arises from the clear brightness of the setting. Here and there it gives an even livelier picture than *Gawain and the Green Knight* (page 159) of medieval social manners; for a medieval writer, like a medieval painter, instead of attempting to give his classical figures a classical setting, simply made them like the lords and ladies of his own time. Pandarus went to visit Criseyde:

> And fond two othere ladyes sete and she
> Withinne a paved parlour; and they three
> Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
> Of the Sege of Thebes whyl hem leste.
>
> *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book ii, lines 81–84.[1]

[1] The references are to Skeat's text, *Works*, volume ii. Compare *Ywain and Gawain* (page 99), lines 3081 and following (quoted in Cambridge History of English Literature, I, 310).

It is hardly worth noticing that any *Siege of Thebes* read by these ladies would be some centuries after the siege of Troy; for they are at home, not in ancient Troy, but in a medieval manor.

> Quod Pandarus, "ma dame, god you see,
> With al your book and al the companye."
> "Ey, uncle myn, welcome ywis," quod she;
> And up she roos, and by the hond in hye
> She took him faste, and seyde, "this night thrye —
> To goode mote it turne — of you I mette."
> And with that word she down on bench him sette.
>
> (ii, 85–91.)

This lively and easy dialogue opens a scene such as one might expect in a modern society play. Prettier, and more essentially dramatic, is the following in the same book.

> Adoun the steyre anoon-right tho she wente
> Into the gardin, with hir neces three,
> And up and doun ther made many a wente,
> Flexippe, she, Tharbe, and Antigone,
> To pleyen, that it Ioye was to see;
> And othere of hir wommen, a gret route,
> Hir folwede in the gardin al aboute.
>
> This yerd was large, and rayled alle the aleyes,
> And shadwed wel with blosmy bowes grene,
> And benched newe, and sonded all the weyes,
> In which she walketh arm in arm bitwene;
> Til at the laste Antigone the shene
> Gan on a Troian song to singe clere,
> That it an heven was hir voys to here.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And of hir song right with that word she stente;
> And therwithal, "now, nece," quod Criseyde,
> "Who made this song with so good entente?"

Antigone answerde anoon and seyde,
"Ma dame, ywis, the goodlieste mayde
Of greet estat in al the toun of Troye,
And let her lyf in most honour and Ioye."

"Forsothe, so it semeth by hir song,"
Quod tho Criseyde, and gan therwith to syke.
(ii, 813–826, 876–884.)

Distinct as is the setting here and throughout the poem, it is not elaborated, as in *Gawain and the Green Knight*, for sheer love of the picturesque. Chaucer has, indeed, incidental descriptions of nature quite lyric in their sympathy:

A nightingale upon a cedre grene
Under the chambre wal theras she lay
Ful loude sang ayein the mone shene,
Paraunter in his briddes wyse a lay
Of love, that made hir herte fresh and gay.
That herkned she so longe in good entente
Til at the last the dede sleep hir hente.
(ii, 918–924.)

But even so he does not turn aside or linger for love of nature. His description is woven in to heighten his story, to enhance our images, as here of the feeling, so more commonly of the speech and action, of his characters. As at the entrance of Pandarus quoted above, he habitually makes distinct suggestions of manner and gesture. So we see Helen coming to the sick-bed of Troilus:

Eleyne in al hir goodly softe wyse
Gan him saluwe and womanly to pleye,
And seyde, "ywis, ye moste alweyes aryse!
Now, fayre brother, beth al hool, I preye!"
And gan hir arm right over his sholder leye.
(ii, 1667–1671.)

Even without these swift touches of description, we should know these people from the sharp characterization of their speech. Thus Pandarus reveals both himself and Troilus when, after hearing the lover's long raptures and the hesitations of modest candor, he cries out:

> "Thou hast a ful gret care
> Lest that the cherl may falle out of the mone!
> Why, lord! I hate of thee thy nyce fare!
> Why, entremete of that thou hast to done!
> For goddes love, I bidde thee a bone,
> So lat me alone, and it shal be thy beste."
> "Why, freend," quod he, "now do right as thee leste."
> (i, 1023–1029.)

Quite as sharply characteristic is the dialogue when Pandarus brings to Criseyde Troilus's first love-letter. She hesitates to receive it. Pandarus protests his amazement. Then suddenly:

> "But for al that ever I may deserve,
> Refuse it nought," quod he, and hente hir faste,
> And in hir bosom the lettre doun he thraste,
>
> And seyde hir, "now cast it away anoon,
> That folk may seen and gauren on us tweye."
> Quod she, "I can abyde til they be goon,"
> And gan to smyle, and seyde him, "eem, I preye,
> Swich answere as yow list yourself purveye;
> For trewely I nil no lettre wryte."
> "No? Than wol I," quod he — "so ye endyte."
> Therwith she lough, and seyde, "go we dyne."
> (ii, 1153–1163.)

Those eleven lines present the situation almost as visibly as if they were acted on the stage. Every word and gesture is interesting because it suggests the character of each,

their interaction, and the movement of the plot. By such essentially dramatic dialogue Chaucer vivifies the main scenes of his story. Though his time was not ripe for English drama, he made this tale largely dramatic in both form and method. And though he did not again compose an entire story in this fashion, he kept in his later work the dramatic method of characterization.

Characterization in this higher range we call creation. We can imagine the great characters of fiction as we imagine our absent friends, because their authors have imagined them first so intensely as to give us their speech and look, their gesture and action. We sympathize with them more readily than with real people, because their authors give us only the characteristic speech and gesture, the significant look and action. Real life is a criss-cross of motives and actions. Literature omits the confusing, the trivial, the insignificant. It simplifies life by interpreting it expressively, by showing us the great moments that count and the actions that express emotion and character. We may live beside a man six weeks, or even six months, without knowing him as well as we know Criseyde. Our acquaintance may be limited to a few people much like ourselves. Indeed, we should not care to know Pandarus in real life. But literature opens to us the whole range of personalities, the whole scale of emotions. Stories that thus interpret life by truly and intensely imagining persons widen and deepen our experience. The art that thus opens our eyes, whether painting or sculpture, or literature, we call creation.

4. CHAUCER'S NARRATIVE FORM

(a) THE HOUSE OF FAME AND THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Unless such creative characterization meant more to Chaucer than the way of putting a story together, it is hard

to understand why he did not use the strong narrative form of the *Troilus and Cressida* in other long poems. *The House of Fame* (before 1384?) and the prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* (about 1385?) keep the allegorical dream-vision of his earlier years. True, the dream-vision of *The House of Fame* is reminiscent also of Dante, but not in any vigor of structure; it is after all an artificial allegory. It is interesting, not in itself, but because it shows incidentally the trend of Chaucer's thought and the combination of his former reading in Ovid, Vergil, and Cicero with his new reading in Italian. The prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* adopts the fashionable literary cult of the *marguerite*, or daisy.

> . . . "whan that the month of May
> Is comen, and that I here the foules singe,
> And that the floures ginnen for to springe,
> Farwel my book and my devocioun!
> Now have I than swich a condicioun
> That, of alle the floures in the mede,
> Than love I most these floures whyte and rede
> Swiche as men callen daysies in our toun.
> To hem have I so greet affeccioun,
> As I seyde erst, whan comen is the May,
> That in my bed ther daweth me no day
> That I nam up and walking in the mede,
> To seen this flour agein the sonne sprede.
>
> *The Legend of Good Women*, Prologue B., 36–48.[1]

Charming as verse and as description, this prologue belongs as narrative form with *The Book of the Duchess*.

Of course, the dating of Chaucer's poems is only approximate; but the tales of *The Legend of Good Women*, whenever written, were drawn from Ovid and Vergil in the conventional medieval way. They are superior merely in style and

[1] The references are to Skeat's text, *Works*, volume iii.

verse, not in form. The Ovid stories are on a par with the Ovid stories of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. They might almost as well have been written by the one poet as by the other; and what little distinction they have is not in narrative form.

(b) THE CANTERBURY TALES

In form the *Canterbury Tales* themselves, written at different times and afterward included in a series, show quite various degrees of skill. Their general prologue, indeed, and the narrative links that lead from one tale to another, show the height of Chaucer's power; but it is power of characterization. The portraits of the Knight, the Squire, and the rest are perhaps the most vivid brief characterizations in English literature. Though each is accomplished in a few lines, each is printed on the memory. But the form of the whole is mere enumeration:

> But natheles, whyl I have tyme and space,
> Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
> Me thinketh it acordaunt to resoun
> To telle yow al the condicioun
> Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
> And whiche they weren, and of what degree,
> And eek in what array that they were inne;
> And at a knight than wol I first biginne.
>
> Canterbury Prologue, 35–42.[1]

The links between tales in the Canterbury series have more virtue of form. They carry on the characterization by dramatic dialogue, with occasional bits of dramatic action.

> Our hoste upon his stiropes stood anon,
> And seyde, "good men, herkneth everich on;

[1] The references are to Skeat's text, *Works*, volume iv.

This was a thrifty tale for the nones!
Sir parish prest," quod he, "for goddes bones,
Tel us a tale, as was thy forward yore.
I see wel that ye lerned men in lore
Can moche good, by goddes dignitee!
The Persone him answerde, "benedicite!
What eyleth the man, so sinfully to swere?"
Our hoste answerde, "O Iankin, be ye there?
I smell a loller in the wind," quod he.
"How! good men," quod our hoste, "herkneth me.
Abydeth, for goddes digne passioun;
For we shal han a predicacioun.
This loller here wil prechen us somwhat."
"Nay, by my fader soule! that shal he nat,"
Seyde the Shipman; "heer he shal nat preche;
He shal no gospel glosen heer ne teche.
We leve alle in the grete god," quod he.
He wolde sowen som difficultee,
Or springen cokkel in our clene corn.
And therfor, hoste, I warne thee biforn,
My Ioly body shal a tale telle;
And I shal clinken yow so mery a belle
That I shal waken al this companye.
But it shal nat ben of philosophye,
Ne *physices*, ne termes queinte of lawe.
Ther is but litel Latin in my mawe.

Canterbury Tales, B. 1163–1190; Skeat's edition, *Works*, volume iv, page 165.

So far, then, Chaucer's eminence has appeared in his doing better what had been done already: in greater melody and richness of verse, especially of stanza, in greater range and beauty of diction, in neater imitation of conventional forms. It has appeared also in something that had not been achieved before, namely, in dramatic characterization. It has appeared

finally in one masterly piece of sustained narrative structure planned on the general, though not on the particular, lines of a drama. What besides *Troilus and Cressida* did he achieve in the structure of narrative? What further did he accept or reject of current medieval art? How did he adapt these traditions? How did he open the way for better story-writing in the Renaissance? To answer these questions, we may group the Canterbury Tales according to their forms.

(1) *Romances*

First, courtly romances of knights errant or of wooing are conspicuously absent. Though the conventional romances of love and adventure are rather long for a collection, there were many good tales of this sort quite short enough to include if Chaucer had been so minded.

> Listeth, lordes, in good entent,
> And I wol telle verrayment
> Of mirthe and of solas,
> Al of a knyght was fair and gent
> In bataille and in tourneyment.
> His name was sir Thopas.
>
> *Canterbury Tales*, B. 1902–1907.

This is the very manner; and it begins the tale put in the Canterbury series into the mouth of the poet himself; but the next stanza gives us shrewd suspicions.

> Yborn he was in fer contree,
> In Flaundres, al biyonde the see,
> At Popering, in the place.
> His fader was a man ful free;
> And lord he was of that contree,
> As it was goddes grace.

Flemish Popering is hardly a scene for romance; and the diction is a shade too conventional. By the next stanza we know that Chaucer is laughing at us.

Sir Thopas wex a doghty swayn.
Whyt was his face as payndemain,
His lippes rede as rose.
His rode is lyk scarlet in grayn,
And I yow telle in good certayn
He hadde a semely nose.

The *Tale of Sir Thopas* goes on in the same sly humor, never running into broad farce, twisting the manner of romance just enough to make it ridiculous, playing the conventional phrase flat.

He priketh thurgh a fair forest,
Therinne is many a wilde best,
Ye, bothe bukke and hare;
And as he priketh north and est,
I telle it yow, him hadde almest
Bitid a sory care. (B. 1944–1949.)

. . . . . .

Sir Thopas eek so wery was
For priking on the softe gras,
So fiers was his corage,
That doun he leyde him in that plas,
To make his stede som solas,
And yaf him good forage. (B. 1968–1973.)

Thus he perverts the pretty "bob-and wheel" stanza used in *Sir Tristrem* (page 133) and *Gawain and the Green Knight* (page 161).

His spere was of fyn ciprees,
That bodeth werre, and nothing pees,
The heed ful sharpe ygrounde.

His stede was al dappel-gray.
It gooth an ambel in the way
Ful softely and rounde
In londe.
Lo, lordes myne, heer is a fit!
If ye wol any more of it,
To telle it wol I fonde. (B. 2071–2080.)

But the second "fit" is hardly more than begun before the Host breaks into the middle of a stanza:

"No more of this, for goddes dignitee,"
Quod oure hoste, "for thou makest me
So wery of thy verray lewednesse
That, also wisly god my soule blesse,
Myn eres aken of thy drasty speche.
Now swiche a rym the devel I biteche!
This may wel be rym dogerel," quod he. (B. 2109–2115.)

Evidently the stock romantic love, adventure, and chivalry, perhaps because such tales gave little scope for characterization, were not in Chaucer's vein.

Even where he used the stock romantic motives, as in the *Knight's Tale*, he took, not an old French romance, but a new Italian tale of Boccaccio, cast in a different mold; and he turned it still farther from the traditional ways of romance. The *Knight's Tale* is taken from Boccaccio's *Teseide*, but entirely made over. The *Teseide* has nearly 10,000 lines; the *Knight's Tale* only 2250,[1] and of these only about 700 are borrowed. Little is left but the mere romantic situation, the two cousins, Palamon and Arcite, devoted friends, falling in love at sight with the same damsel and

[1] Of the stock romances, *Bevis of Hampton* (page 113) has 4600 lines; *Guy of Warwick* (page 116), 12,000; *Arthour and Merlin* (page 129), 10,000.

fighting for her in a great tournament. This situation Chaucer built up, not into an absorbing series of events impelled by the characters of the actors, but into a series of brilliant descriptions, a pageant not unlike Vergil's:

> The rede statue of Mars, with spere and targe,
> So shyneth in his whyte baner large
> That alle the feeldes gliteren up and doun.
> And by his baner born is his penoun
> Of gold ful riche in which ther was ybete
> The Minotaur, which that he slough in Crete.
> *The Knight's Tale*, 117–122 (A. 975–980).

Emily, the heroine, is not characterized, and takes no part in the action. She is simply the damsel of romance, the prize of the fighting. Her first appearance, besides being one of Chaucer's loveliest descriptions, is a very picture of romance.

> This passeth yeer by yeer, and day by day,
> Til it fil ones in a morwe of May,
> That Emelye, that fairer was to sene
> Than is the lilie upon his stalke grene,
> And fresher than the May with floures newe —
> For with the rose colour stroof hir hewe;
> I noot which was the fairer of hem two —
> Er it were day, as was hir wone to do,
> She was arisen, and al redy dight;
> For May wol have no slogardye anight.
> The sesoun priketh every gentil herte,
> And maketh him out of his sleep to sterte,
> And seith, "Arys and do thyn observaunce."
> This maked Emelye have remembraunce
> To doon honour to May and for to ryse.
> Yclothed was she fresh, for to devyse.
> Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse
> Bihinde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse.
> And in the gardin at the sonne upriste

She walketh up and doun, and as hir liste
She gadereth floures, party whyte and rede,
To make a sotil gerland for hir hede;
And as an aungel hevenly she song.
The Knight's Tale, 175–197 (A. 1033–1055.)

But Emily is there simply to be loved. She is not even wooed. The whole story is of the strife of the cousins, and the poet spends his time on the lists, the armor, and the trapping. *Troilus and Cressida* is like a drama; but the *Knight's Tale* is like a series of tableaux.

The *Squire's Tale* is an unfinished excursion into romantic adventure. Its first part reminds one somewhat of *Gawain and the Green Knight* (page 154).

And so bifel that, after the thridde cours,
Whyl that this king sit thus in his nobleye,
Herkning his minstralles hir thinges pleye
Biforn him at the bord deliciously,
In at the halle dore al sodeynly
Ther cam a knight upon a stede of bras,
And in his hand a brood mirour of glas.
Upon his thombe he hadde of gold a ring,
And by his syde a naked swerd hanging;
And up he rydeth to the heighe bord.
The Squire's Tale, F. 76–85.

Nor is this accidental. The strange knight

Saludeth king and queen and lordes alle
By ordre, as they seten in the halle,
With so heigh reverence and obeisaunce
As wel in speche as in contenaunce
That Gawain with his olde curteisye,
Though he were come ageyn out of Fairye,
Ne coude him nat amende with a word.
. . . . . .

Albeit that I can nat soune his style,
Ne can nat climben over so heigh a style,
Yet seye I this, as to commune entente,
Thus muche amounteth al that ever he mente.
The Squire's Tale, F. 91–108.

The sly satire on the romantic style is not kept up. Chaucer is not here, as in *Sir Thopas*, engaged in parody. He intends a romance of his own, full of marvels. Not venturing to bring Gawain again "out of faery," he turns to the oriental tales for magic horse, ring, and sword. The oriental sources have none of the vague Celtic symbolism, none of the Celtic wooing. They are more definite, and more easily used for mere excitement of plot. Even so Chaucer breaks off in the middle. Though the dramatic link between this tale and the next stands in the manuscript, the tale itself is unfinished.

The typical short romance of the French type is represented in the *Canterbury Tales* by the *Man of Law's Tale* of Constance. In form this is nothing but a series of marvellous adventures happening through many years to a heroine whose holy patience triumphs over all persecutions. It is substantially like the medieval legends of the saints.[1] Chaucer's art was spent, not on the form, but on the characterization. He enhances the tale by enhancing our imaginative sympathy with Constance.

Hir litel child lay weping in hir arm;
And kneling, pitously to him she seyde,
"Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee non harm,"
With that hir kerchef of hir heed she breyde,
And over his litel yen she it leyde;

[1] The saint's legend appears unmodified in Chaucer's *Life of Saint Cecilia*, a metrical version of the story in the *Golden Legend* (page 94). Though this appears in the *Canterbury Tales* as the tale of the *Second Nun*, it was probably written as early as 1374.

And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,
And into heven hir yen up she caste.
The Man of Law's Tale, B. 834–840.

Embodiment of Christian virtues, Constance is yet no mere personification. The story of how she was made perfect through suffering moves us, indeed, by its very subject-matter, but also by a pure simplicity of diction which shows that the poet who interpreted so vividly the world, the flesh, and the devil, could interpret also the spiritual power of the soul devoted to God. "To depict such a nature as this in its ideal perfection, and yet to make us feel the force of her personality, and love her and sympathize with her, to accomplish this is a greater artistic triumph than to create a Criseyde," says Professor Root.[1] Whether or not we agree with this estimate, we must feel the force of the following sentence. "Chaucer is here working in the spirit of the Christian Middle Age, which loved the perfect, the universal; it was the Renaissance which taught us to set such store by the necessarily imperfect *individual*." The *Man of Law's Tale*, in spirit and in form alike, is intensely medieval.

An even finer flower of medieval art is the extraordinarily concise tale put in the Canterbury series into the mouth of the *Prioress*. A revolting story of how a devout schoolboy was murdered by Jews for singing continually the praise of Mary has been wrought to poignant pathos within the compass of some two hundred lines. A prologue of thirty-five lines at once characterizes the teller and sets the key of spiritual elevation:

O Lord our Lord, thy name how merveillous
Is in this large worlde ysprad, quod she.
For noght only thy laude precious
Parfourned is by men of dignitee;

[1] *The Poetry of Chaucer*, page 187.

But by the mouth of children thy bountee
Parfourned is, for on the brest soukinge
Som tyme shewen they thyn heryinge.

B. 1643–1649.

This noble translation of the opening of the eighth Psalm (*Domine, Dominus noster*) gives both theme and tone. The tale itself, partly, perhaps, because Chaucer is versifying an *exemplum* (page 93), is pared away almost to bareness. There is neither suspense nor climax. Chaucer neither elaborates a crisis nor gives salience to the incidents. There is no virtue of narrative form except poetic compression. The story is not recast, merely retold, but retold with such force and sweetness of phrase as stamps it forever on the memory. The horror fades; and there remains a bright vision of the holy innocent inspired to give his heart's blood to the praise of the Mother of Purity.

Among thise children was a widwes sone
A litel clergeon seven yeer of age,
That day by day to scole was his wone;
And eek also, wheras he saugh thimage
Of Cristes moder, hadde he in usage,
As him was taught, to knele adoun and seye
His *Ave Marie* as he goth by the weye.

. . . . . .

As I have seyd, thurghout the Iewerye
This litel child, as he cam to and fro,
Ful merily than wold he singe and crye
O Alma Redemptoris evermo.
The swetnes hath his herte perced so
Of Cristes moder that, to hir to preye,
He can nat stinte of singing by the weye.

. . . . . .

"O martir, souded to virginitee,

Now maystou singen, folwing ever in oon
The whyte Lamb celestial," quod she,
"Of which the grete evangelist seint Iohn
In Pathmos wroot." . . .
B. 1692–1698, 1741–1747, 1769–1773.

(2) *Fabliaux*

In somewhat the same way he used the *fabliau* (page 105 and foot-note). Some half-dozen of the *Canterbury Tales* are of this baser sort; and they all show Chaucer's mastery of the complication and solution of sheer plot. For the *fabliau*, like farce on the stage, gets its strongest effects by crowding its events into a short time and a single place, by taking events, as it were, at their crisis, and revealing whatever is necessary of the previous history through the action itself. It never roams, as the romances do, over many years and many countries. Not all *fabliaux* have such compression of time and place; but the best of them may have been the means of showing Chaucer that this is the method for dramatic rapidity. Whatever the form may have thus been worth to him as practice, his own tales of this sort are distinguished rather by their strokes of character. The interest of character, indeed, is made to dominate the unsavory jest.

(3) *Other Short Tales of Terse Composition*

For again and again we are reminded both that Chaucer had a clear sense of narrative form and that he cared very little about it. In form, like Boccaccio, he is usually quite medieval. Except in his *Troilus and Cressida*, he was not an innovator. He has, indeed, two or three short tales which in their intensity of compression are so startlingly modern that we should call them today short stories in that special

sense which we now attach to the term. Such a tale is the delicious comedy assigned to the *Nun's Priest.* This old beast-fable (page 107) of the cock and the fox is told with an eye mainly to expanding the humor of giving human speech and motives to the barnyard. Its chief charm is in the sly suggestiveness of its candidly simple phrase. But it is remarkable also for the swiftness of its action within a well-limited time and place. Chaucer takes time to make his chanticleer cite long examples from the ancients; that is part of the fun; but he makes the action move to its event with the lively swiftness of the best *fabliaux.* The same method of compression gives poignancy to the grim tale of the *Pardoner.* Again Chaucer takes time for the full ironical effect of letting the venal Pardoner preach righteousness. Though this prologue delays the start, it enhances the significance; and, apart from this, the tale moves with terrible swiftness of action. Three drunken scoundrels, interrupted in a tavern by the clinking bell of a funeral during the plague, start up with an oath to kill death. Plotting to defraud one another of a treasure thrown in their way by the mysterious presence that they seek, they are brought in turn by their own intrigue each to a violent end at the hands of the others. There is no pause. In the morning they set out in blind fury; at night they are all dead; and the awful figure that they sought has passed on. These two tales have a narrative force of sheer form quite beyond the usual art of the middle age. But so have two or three tales of Boccaccio's *Decameron;* and so, even in the twelfth century, have two of Walter Map's (page 96). All these are exceptions. In general, Chaucer used the medieval narrative forms as he found them. He enriched with description; he adapted for purposes of characterization, as in the deliberate garrulity of the *Canon's Yeoman;* he expanded or compressed the material of a

given story; but he did not often change the whole frame. In form the *Canterbury Tales* are various; but the variety is due to adaptation of accepted models. The technical mark of Chaucer's eminence is not narrative form, but dramatic characterization.

(4) *Medieval Framework Tales*

(w) CONFESSIO AMANTIS

Obviously to be compared with the *Canterbury Tales* is the *Confessio Amantis* of John Gower.[1] Not only were the two collections nearly contemporaneous, but the two authors were long spoken of together without much critical distinction. The tales of the *Confessio Amantis* deserved their evidently wide popularity by the smoothness of their verse and still more by their terseness and lucidity. They are neither spun out nor interrupted; they move evenly and pleasantly. Further in narrative art they do not go. Even the best of them lack Chaucer's richness of imaginative

[1] Gower (1335 or earlier, to 1408), a friend of Chaucer, who calls him "moral Gower," wrote: (1) in French stanzas, *Speculum Meditantis* (*Mirour de l' Omme*, 30,000 lines, about 1378), "rightly to teach the way by which the sinner who has trespassed ought to return to the knowledge of his Creator," and two collections of *balades*; (2) in Latin, besides the *Cronica Tripertita* and several short pieces, *Vox Clamantis* (10,000 elegiac verses, about 1382) on "the various misfortunes which happened in England in the time of King Richard II," especially the insurrection of the peasants; and in English, besides the *Confessio Amantis* (1390) a poem *In Praise of Peace*. The definitive edition is the *Complete Works*, edited with introductions, notes, and glossaries, by G. C. Macaulay (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1899–1902; four volumes, one each to the French and Latin works, two to the English). The same editor has prepared, with notes and glossary, a one-volume edition of *Selections from the Confessio Amantis* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1903). For further discussion of Gower's narrative art see H. S. Canby's *The Short Story in English*, chapter iv.

realization, especially his realization of character; and their evenness, though pleasantly fluent, is partly a negative virtue. Gower's story-telling generally lacks salience; it does not rise to great moments; it maintains an even pace partly because it has little emphasis. In this narrative habit Gower was but the more typically medieval. Medieval hearers and readers so far rejoiced in sheer plot that they were often content either with a loosely joined series of incidents or with mere narrative summary. The latter Gower shows at its best; his terseness is often admirable; but it is often bare. As he permits himself no such digressions as those of Chaucer's *Nun's Priest* or *Pardoner*, so on the other hand he is incapable of the chief narrative distinction of those tales, strength of structure.

But Gower's inferiority is much more apparent in his whole plan. After a long prologue the lover (*amans*) is bidden in a May-morning vision by the queen of love to make confession to Genius, her priest. To exemplify sins against love and instruct in its lore, the priest tells his penitent some hundred tales. Sins of seeing are exemplified by the legends of Actæon and of the Gorgons; sins of hearing, by the legends of the Aspis and of the Sirens. The penitent having confessed briefly his sins under these heads, the priest proceeds to expound the seven deadly sins and exemplify them in their various aspects, pausing between tales to hear the lover's confession and to moralize. This framework of confession with its categories of sins, far from having literary value, is so unwieldy that it breaks down and so formal that it soon becomes a tiresome intrusion. A convention borrowed from the *Roman de la Rose* (page 178), it does not serve to enhance the tales by effective grouping. The value of the *Confessio Amantis* is in its tales considered separately; in framework it is little more than a collection of *exempla*

(page 91). Its 33,000 lines are none too many for the telling of the tales; but too many of them are given to mere machinery.

(x) THE DECAMERON

No less obviously to be compared is that Italian collection of one hundred tales which is perhaps the most widely famous of the middle age, the *Decameron* (1353). In his preface Boccaccio calls these tales "short romances, or *fabliaux*, or *exempla*, or histories" [1] (*"novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo"*). About forty of them are such simple summary narratives as the tale of Constance or the tale of Florent, told by both Chaucer and Gower. These, perhaps, are what Boccaccio meant by *novelle* and *istorie*. More than fifty others, though not exemplary in matter, belong in form to the general type *exemplum;* that is, they may be grouped as anecdotes. Of these some approach consistency of structure. Having long introductions, unnecessary lapse of time, or other structural looseness, they still work out a main situation in one day or one night; they sometimes show dramatic ingenuity of incident; less frequently they reach distinct climax. Where the climax is merely an ingenious escape or a triumphant retort, the tale remains none the less anecdote; but in some of the tales, especially those of the seventh day, the climax is so built on the action as to give some effect of culmination. Whether Boccaccio thought of all these anecdotes indifferently as *parabole*, or meant some distinction by *favole*, at any rate there remain a few other tales which show such narrative consistency as appears in Chau-

[1] It is not clear whether Boccaccio meant to make the distinctions of form implied in this translation of his terms or meant rather to deprecate such distinctions.

cer's *Nun's Priest* or *Pardoner;* and most of these, as most of Chaucer's corresponding tales, are fabliaux.[1]

The framework of the *Decameron* is far superior to that of the *Confessio Amantis* in literary value. "I propose," says Boccaccio in his preface, "to tell a hundred tales . . . told in ten days by a noble company of seven ladies and three youths in the time of the late pestilence . . . in the which tales appear pleasant or rude chances of love and other incidents of fortune happening as well in modern times as in ancient." After describing the plague in Florence, the "noble company," and the fair country house to which they withdrew for safety, Boccaccio makes each of his ten persons tell a tale each day on the same general theme. Thus he arranges ten groups of ten tales each, with charming interludes of conversation, song, and description. But it is only the charm of style that saves the connective scheme from monotony. The narrators are merely mouthpieces; the grouping of the tales is not used, as by Chaucer, to bring about contrast and personal interchange; the setting, though vastly more attractive than the heavy allegorical fiction of the *Confessio Amantis,* is merely repeated with variations.

[1] As to narrative form the tales of the *Decameron* may be roughly classified as follows;

anecdote

(*a*) *simple anecdote:* I, all but nov. 4; III, nov. 4; V, nov. 4; VI, entire; VIII, all but nov. 7 and 8; IX, nov. 1 and 7–10. . . .33

(*b*) *anecdote more artistically elaborated:* III, nov. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6; V, nov. 10; VII, entire; VIII, nov. 7; IX, nov. 2–5 . . . . . 21 . . 55

short or summary romance 40

fabliau 5

100

(y) THE SEVEN SAGES

No less monotonous essentially is the framework of the *Seven Sages*, a framework naturally similar to that of the *Arabian Nights*. An oriental collection of great antiquity, the *Seven Sages* is found in eight oriental versions. Of the forty or more western versions, comprising together more than two hundred manuscripts, the most widely influential was the French *Sept Sages de Rome*. There are nine medieval English versions in the octosyllabic couplet, the manuscripts ranging from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth, besides several printed English versions of different derivation. In a word, of all medieval collections the *Seven Sages* is one of the most widely diffused. The framework common to these numerous and various versions is the following:

"A young prince is tempted by his stepmother, the queen. She, being rebuffed by him, accuses him of attempting to violate her, and he is condemned to death. His life is saved by seven wise men, who secure a stay of execution of the royal decree by entertaining the king through seven days with tales showing the wickedness of woman, the queen meantime recounting stories to offset those of the sages. On the eighth day the prince, who has remained silent up to that time, speaks in his own defence, and the queen is put to death." [1]

Evidently the ancient framework is both simple and inflexible. For though it is superior to that of the *Confessio Amantis*, and even that of the *Decameron*, in being itself a story, it affords slight literary opportunity. The

[1] Quoted from pages xi–xii of *The Seven Sages of Rome*, edited from the manuscripts, with introduction, notes, and glossary, by Killis Campbell (Boston & New York, 1907). This ample and suggestive study of manuscripts, sources, and analogues, from which the data above are derived, is of general value as an exposition of medieval literary transmission.

king, stayed by the tale of the first sage, finds the queen in tears, and is won back by her countertale to reaffirm his sentence on the prince. With mere variation of the dialogue this scene is repeated six times. Instead of being always different, as in the *Canterbury Tales*, the interlude between tales is always substantially the same. Not only are the tales generally alike in form, being all by the necessity of the plan *exempla*, but the plan itself is little more than a vehicle.

(z) The Canterbury Tales in their Setting

Chaucer's plan is evidently larger and more flexible. In its mere idea the fiction of a travelling company has more literary value than the fiction of a confession, a trial, or even a house-party. It is more interesting in itself; and it gives more opportunity for what, indeed, may have suggested it — for characterization. Not only is Chaucer's fame in this regard based for many readers on the general prologue, but every interlude is used to bring out character by playing person against person. The skill of the interludes is the skill of the *Troilus and Cressida*. In both cases the only word to describe it is *dramatic*. Instead of being pauses, whether pleasant as Boccaccio's or tedious as Gower's, the interludes are usually more interesting than the tales. Instead of being merely a literary device, the framework of the *Canterbury Tales* enhances greatly the literary value of the parts and promises to bind them into a whole.

For, besides adding to each tale the value of its teller, the framework is used to group the tales more effectively than either Gower's plan or Boccaccio's. How far Chaucer meant to use it so we can only guess. His scheme remained unfinished; and the manuscripts do not agree in the order. But there are instances enough of happy juxtaposition to reveal the general intention. Chaucer meant to play both

teller against teller and tale against tale. For instance, the parody romance of *Sir Thopas* gains much in point by the rude interruption of the host (see page 216). The following tale of *Melibeus* implies a counter-thrust, to judge from the host's rueful comparison between the wife of Melibeus and his own. The Wife of Bath's serene self-revelation in her astounding prologue may have been meant to glance at this and to take its cue from the comedy of Chanticleer and Partlet presented by the *Nun's Priest.* Certainly her prologue both enforces the point of her tale and prepares the way for other tales of the *maistrye* of women in marriage.[1] These and other hints of plan confirm an attentive reader's feeling that Chaucer's framework, alike in characterization and in arrangement, shows dramatic intention.

[1] See W. W. Lawrence in *Modern Philology*, xi, no. 2 (October, 1913), with Lawrence's references to Kittredge and Tatlock; and, for a summary of considerations of the order of the tales, R. K. Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer*, pages 152–159.

CHAPTER VII

POPULAR COMPOSITION

1. BALLADS

HERE and there in the literature of this period are references to other unrecorded tales; tales, not written, but sung; tales composed, not for gentlefolk, but for the common, unlettered people. These are the ballads. Such ballads as were preserved by being written down centuries later show a strongly marked type, a kind of composition as distinct, and perhaps as widely spread over Europe, as any form of romance.

KEMP OWYNE

1 Her mother died when she was young,
  Which gave her cause to make great moan;
Her father married the warst woman
  That ever lived in Christendom.

2 She served her with foot and hand,
  In everything that she could dee,[1]
Till once, in an unlucky time,
  She threw her in ower Craigy's sea.

3 Says, "Lie you there, dove Isabel,
  And all my sorrows lie with thee;
Till Kemp Owyne come ower the sea,
  And borrow [2] you with kisses three,
Let all the warld do what they will,
  Oh borrowed shall you never be!"

[1] do. [2] ransom.

4 Her breath grew strang, her hair grew lang,
And twisted thrice about the tree,
And all the people, far and near,
Thought that a savage beast was she.

5 These news did come to Kemp Owyne,
Where he lived, far beyond the sea;
He hasted him to Craigy's sea,
And on the savage beast lookd he.

6 Her breath was strang, her hair was lang,
And twisted was about the tree,
And with a swing she came about:
"Come to Craigy's sea, and kiss with me.

7 "Here is a royal belt," she cried,
"That I have found in the green sea;
And while your body it is on,
Drawn shall your blood never be;
But if you touch me, tail or fin,
I vow my belt your death shall be."

8 He stepped in, gave her a kiss,
The royal belt he brought him wi;
Her breath was strang, her hair was lang,
And twisted twice about the tree,
And with a swing she came about:
"Come to Craigy's sea, and kiss with me."

9 "Here is a royal ring," she said,
"That I have found in the green sea;
And while your finger it is on,
Drawn shall your blood never be;
But if you touch me, tail or fin,
I swear my ring your death shall be."

10 He stepped in, gave her a kiss,
The royal ring he brought him wi;
Her breath was strang, her hair was lang,
And twisted ance about the tree,
And with a swing she came about:
"Come to Craigy's sea and kiss with me."

11 "Here is a royal brand," she said,
That I have found in the green sea;
And while your body it is on,
Drawn shall your blood never be."

12 He stepped in, gave her a kiss,
The royal brand he brought him wi;
Her breath was sweet, her hair grew short,
And twisted nane about the tree,
And smilingly she came about,
As fair a woman as fair could be.

Here is a fairy-story. What it tells is like some of the earlier romances, and still more like the folk-lore that lies behind them (page 71). Many other ballads tell of witch wives or elfin lovers; some, like the romances again, tell legends of saints or other historical personages; even of Arthur and Gawain. A few are not merely like the romances in subject; they are the same tales. The ballad of *Fair Annie* is the same story as Marie's *Lai del Fresne* (page 90). There is a ballad, as well as a romance, of *Horn* (page 118). *Childe Waters* is essentially like the story of patient Griselda; and *Sir Hugh* is the *Prioress's Tale* (page 220). Moreover a ballad is at least as likely as a romance to be widespread. Though they were not diffused in the same ways, nearly all the most popular English ballads have been found in other countries. At bottom they are no more English than they are French or Scandinavian.

But here the resemblance to romance ends. These likenesses, though interesting, are far less significant than the differences. *Kemp Owyne* is fundamentally unlike any form of narrative that we have considered. It shows a different way of story-telling. Similar as it is in subject-matter to the story of Henno, for instance (page 60), in method and effect it is as unlike as possible. So in the ballads just cited as telling tales of romance the likeness of subject is far less striking than the difference of treatment. What is this difference, and why? It has been suggested that the ballads are generally abbreviated and debased versions of the romances. But in most cases the ballads were not borrowed from the romances. Rather we may suppose both to have sprung often from a common source; but at least the assumption that the ballad was generally taken from the romance cannot be maintained. Thus the ballads are not abbreviated. We must explain their brevity otherwise. Nor are they debased. Different as their narrative is, it is not inferior. It has its own success; it fulfils its own purpose.

This purpose was primarily oral. Ballads were not written; they were sung. They were not read; they were heard. We read them today only because the days of oral verse-narrative are gone. Many of the ballads, like this of *Kemp Owyne*, were first written down in comparatively modern times by collectors. A very few manuscripts go back to the fifteenth century; many are of the seventeenth century, the eighteenth, even the nineteenth. But the ballads thus finally written down had been circulating orally, some of them since Shakespeare's time, some of them since Chaucer's time; and there is little doubt that others, now lost, were in oral circulation even earlier. Throughout most of their history they had little to do with manuscript. They are anonymous; and they are essentially oral. Daughters,

learning them from their mother's singing, sang them in turn to their children, or in village groups.[1] Thus becoming traditional, they have survived in unlettered communities even down to our own time. In 1886 a girl was overheard singing in New York City a ballad that she had learned from her grandmother in Ireland. The collector who transcribed it found it to be the old ballad of *Sir Hugh*. A ballad called *The Hangman's Tree* was "taken down from singing in America a few years ago. Miss Backus, who obtained the ballad, remarks, on the basis of local information: 'This is an old English song, . . . which was brought over to Virginia before the Revolution. It has not been written for generations, for none of the family have been able to read or write.' . . . [It] is a version of 'The Maid Freed from the Gallows.'" [2] These two cases are highly exceptional in occurring so recently; but they help us to comprehend what oral tradition was in the days before the education of the masses. In the middle age, romances, though they often show oral sources, were written to be read by such of the gentry as could read; but the common people, who could not read, heard and sang ballads.

Through oral transmission ballads were not only preserved; they were also changed. The romances, too, were changed

[1] I will not rehearse all the mannèr;
For whoso wishes, he may hear
Young women when they will play
Sing it among them any day.

Barbour's *Bruce*, xvi, 519 (modernized). Barbour is speaking of the three times when fifty men defeated a host. Compare also what Geoffrey of Monmouth says (page 79) of oral Arthur traditions.

[2] *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* edited from the collection of Francis James Child, by Helen Child Sargent and George Lyman Kittredge, introduction, page xxv. This introduction is the best brief exposition of the ballad form.

in transmission (page 74), but less frequently than the ballads and more deliberately, since the changes were the work of poets who could hold to their copy when they chose. For a ballad there was no copy. Each singer repeating it as he remembered it, changes were partly accidental, partly due to changes in the conditions of recitation, at most deliberate to the extent of combining one ballad with another. Thus most ballads, and practically all the best known ones, appear in several versions;[1] and if every oral tradition could have been preserved, the versions would be multiplied indefinitely. Yet through the various versions of a ballad there is in most cases something constant, a story clearly recognizable as the same, and a definite manner of telling. Through manifold slight oral variations a ballad remains a distinct story.

In being oral the ballads were adapted to the common people; and they were popular in other ways. The romances took folk-lore, indeed, but transformed it; the ballads kept more of the original telling of the folk, at once strong and eerie. *Kemp Owyne*, even in its modern form, is still told much as old wives must have originally told those wild tales which Marie and Walter Map turned into sweet verse and elegant prose. Here is neither sweetness nor elegance. As the ballads tell often of violence and sometimes of crime, so they tell the tale bluntly. Here is no description except rude conventional terms; here is no sentiment. But though the ballad of *Kemp Owyne* is brief almost to bareness, without elaboration of any sort, it pauses to give three separate stages by which this British Perseus released his Andromeda; and these three stages are told in almost the same

[1] The authoritative collection, including all significant versions of all known English ballads, with exhaustive notes for study, is *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, edited by Francis James Child, 5 volumes, Boston, 1882–1898.

terms. Indeed the triad with its slightly varied refrain comprises half the tale; and the refrain begins even earlier. This refrain, then, is not a poetic embellishment; it is a kind of nucleus; it determines the structure. The tale is built around the refrain. Possibly, therefore, the ballads are popular in the further sense of being partly composed by the people. They may have been originally dance-songs with communal refrain, as perhaps were some of those hero-songs which were afterward shaped by poets into epic (page 18). No ballad as we have it today, still less any epic, is communal in the sense of being a transcription of such dance-songs. Every ballad that has survived may have been retouched, or even reshaped, both by oral repetition and by conscious art. But the ballads probably preserve, especially in their incremental repetition, echoes of communal composition.[1] Though this cannot be determined, and though it has been warmly disputed, it is the only theory that accounts fully for the peculiarly popular character of the ballads. That popular character, at any rate, however it arose, marks the ballads off in method and structure from all other verse-tales of the middle age. The whole body of ballads, some three hundred in English, is fairly homogeneous. In spite of many minor differences due to the accidents of time and place and transmission, it is yet unmistakably recognizable as a distinct body of popular verse-tales.

The distinctive ballad traits are least obvious in the longer ballads. In the longest and most popular of all, the "geste" of *Robin Hood*, the reason is plain. The "geste" is not a ballad, but a collection of ballads woven together about the figure of a traditional hero into a rude sort of epic. The stir-

[1] This is the theory of Gummere, whose *Popular Ballad* (Boston and New York, 1907) is the most scholarly and extensive discussion of the subject.

ring tales of *Chevy Chase* and *Otterburn* again, though they have ballad traits, are carried beyond the usual ballad scope in the direction of the greater English war-songs. Typically a ballad does not undertake a narrative so extended; typically it tells a single situation. Though in narrative scope it is thus like a *fabliau* (page 104) or some few of the shortest romances, in narrative method it is quite different. The method seen in *Kemp Owyne* may be studied more closely in one of the best of all ballads.

SIR PATRICK SPENS

1 The king sits in Dumferling toune,
Drinking the blude-reid wine:
"O whar will I get a guid sailor,
To sail this schip of mine?"

2 Up and spak an eldern knicht,
Sat at the kings richt kne:
"Sir Patrick Spence is the best sailor
That sails upon the se."

3 The king has written a braid letter,
And signd it wi his hand,
And sent it to Sir Patrick Spence,
Was walking on the sand.

4 The first line that Sir Patrick red,
A loud lauch lauched he;
The next line that Sir Patrick red,
The teir blinded his ee.

5 "O wha is this has don this deid,
This ill deid don to me,
To send me out this time o' the yeir,
To sail upon the se!

6 "Mak haste, mak haste, my mirry men all,
Our guid schip sails the morne:"
"O say na sae, my master deir,
For I feir a deadlie storme.

7 "Late late yestreen I saw the new moone,
Wi the auld moone in hir arme,
And I feir, I feir, my deir master,
That we will cum to harme."

8 O our Scots nobles wer richt laith
To weet their cork-heild schoone;
Bot lang owre a' the play wer playd,
Thair hats they swam aboone.

9 O lang, lang may their ladies sit
Wi thair fans into their hand,
Or eir they se Sir Patrick Spence
Cum sailing to the land.

10 O lang, lang may the ladies stand,
Wi thair gold kems in their hair,
Waiting for thair ain deir lords,
For they'll se thame na mair.

11 Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour,
It's fiftie fadom deip,
And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence,
Wi the Scots lords at his feit.

The narrative force of this tale is very striking. It is almost pure narrative. Description, as in *Kemp Owyne*, is reduced to a few conventional phrases. Omission is carried to the extreme of narrative conciseness. The tale does not explain how the king happened to be sitting in Dumferling, how he happened to have a new ship, why he wished to send

it; it does not explain who Sir Patrick was, how he happened to have men at hand, what the grudge was against him, who brought him the letter, where he found his men, who the man was that spoke of the weather. Though some of the other versions tell what happened between stanzas 7 and 8, none of them tells it at length. The method in all is substantially the same. The narrative force is due very largely to compression.

For this is not, of course, mere omission; it is a focusing of the imagination on the salient scenes. The story is a little tragedy. The story-teller has focused on those scenes which most suggest the tragic significance. Therefore it irresistibly suggests a shaping hand, a poet of conscious narrative art. Such shaping there may well have been at some point or points in the transmission of this ballad. Though it can be neither proved nor disproved, it seems probable. But *Sir Patrick Spens*, whether manipulated or not, is after all a typical ballad. The shaping hand, if there was one, kept the traditional structure. Narrative swiftness, though it is not always so well achieved, is more or less characteristic of all ballads. It distinguishes them as a class. They usually omit, as *Sir Patrick Spens;* they usually crowd the necessary information and some of the action into dialogue; they usually limit the time and place; they almost always achieve climax. This typical ballad compression seems to arise from a narrative purpose to tell not so much a series of events as a single situation. True, the longer ballads do narrate a series of events; but in this they have advanced beyond the typical ballad structure. In structure, at least, they are a later development. Typically a ballad corresponds in popular composition to such an instance of artistic composition as Browning's *Meeting at Night.* The aim is to make the hearers imagine a crisis vividly and to

feel its significance, usually its tragedy. A ballad begins, as Gray said, in the fifth act of the play.[1] What Gray felt in *Child Maurice* we feel no less in *Sir Patrick Spens*, *Edward*, or *Babylon*, the intensity of a situation or crisis. The English romance of *King Horn* (page 118) is unusually short, some fifteen hundred lines; but the ballad of *Hind Horn* has less than a hundred because it tells the main situation instead of the story.

HIND HORN

1 In Scotland there was a babie born,
Lill lal, etc.
And his name it was called young Hind Horn.
With a fal lal, etc.

2 He sent a letter to our king
That he was in love with his daughter Jean.

3 He's gien to her a silver wand,
With seven living lavrocks sitting thereon.

4 She's gien to him a diamond ring,
With seven bright diamonds set therein.

5 "When this ring grows pale and wan,
You may know by it my love is gane."

6 One day as he looked his ring upon,
He saw the diamonds pale and wan.

7 He left the sea and came to land,
And the first that he met was an old beggar man.

8 "What news, what news?" said young Hind Horn;
"No news, no news," said the old beggar man.

[1] Gray to Mason, *Works*, edited by Gosse, ii, 316; cited by Gummere, *The Popular Ballad*, 182.

9 "No news," said the beggar, "no news at a',
But there is a wedding in the king's ha."

. . . . . .

Thereupon, as in the romance, Horn goes to the hall in disguise and wins his bride. This is indeed the fifth act. The first part omits so much that it is hardly clear. Crudely handled, as here, the ballad omission may be merely abrupt; highly developed, as in *Sir Patrick Spens*, it furthers that singleness of impression which is an almost unique narrative force. The habit may have begun, as has been said above, in dance-song with communal refrain. Bride-stealing, a situation often told in ballads, may in some far-off day have been half presented, half represented, by a dancing chorus of villagers, singing one detail after another and iterating a common refrain. But, whatever its origin, the ballad habit of compression fits exactly the ballad intention of impressing a single situation.

By their marked habit of verse narrative, then, the ballads constitute a distinct form. Beginning, in whatever way, among the common people, they were cherished, circulated, and handed down among the common people. These strong tales of legendary lore, of the mystery of the other world, of the bitterness of hate and the doom of passion, ran their course apart from the course of literature until at last they caught the attention of men of letters. So in the twelfth century the fairy folk-lore of the Celts had attracted the attention of French poets (page 77). But then the folk-lore was transformed by the poets into romances. The ballads, when they came centuries afterward into literature, had long fixed a distinct form of their own. They could not be transformed. They might inspire a poet like Coleridge to compose something of his own at once similar in detail and

very different as a whole; for the reading of ballads suggested *The Ancient Mariner*. They might be — they were — sometimes mutilated or extended, garbled or "improved," by transcribers; but they were too vitally distinct to be merged in other forms of composition. In 1765 Bishop Percy published *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, a collection of ballads taken from a manuscript then about a century old. The seventeenth-century collector who made this Percy Folio revealed to modern literature the essential characteristics of popular poetry.

2. MEDIEVAL BEGINNINGS OF DRAMA: MIRACLE PLAYS

Medieval drama was popular in being addressed, as the ballads were, to common people. In both ballad and drama there was something communal; but there the resemblance ends. The medieval ballad was a distinct form, already fixed and soon to fade. True, ballads lasted long after the middle age, but mainly by repetition or modification of those already made. With every century the chances for a new ballad were fewer, until now the ballad has long been extinct as a form of composition. There will be no more ballads; for the conditions in which they were produced are long past. Medieval drama, on the other hand, was quite indistinct, only beginning, feeling its way, and not finding its way till the Renaissance. Today drama is elaborate, highly artistic, the most distinct and the most difficult of all forms of composition. How far it has developed we can see almost startlingly by contrast with its medieval beginnings. Yet even these beginnings show what drama is in germ.

What do we mean when we call a situation dramatic? [1]

[1] This paragraph and the two following are adapted from the author's *Writing and Speaking*, chapter x.

The word, like epic and lyric, comes from the Greek; and its Greek root means to do, or act. A drama, then, represents action; a dramatic situation is a situation or a scene involving action. We speak of the action of a play, and of the players as actors. Still, this does not distinguish drama from other forms of story-telling. A drama is a story put upon the stage. What kind of action is appropriate to representation on a stage? The clue is in the word representation. A drama does not tell about actions; it represents them. Its situations are not described; they are acted. Now in this regard situations that are much the same in general narrative interest differ very much in dramatic interest. Some we are content to hear or read about; others we should like to see. A dramatic situation is a scene such as we should like to see on the stage. Gawain and his two companions meeting three damsels at the cross-roads (page 65), — interesting to read about, but not especially interesting to see. The scoundrel in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* meeting the Death that he blindly sought to destroy — interesting to read and also interesting to see. Haman coming in his pride before King Ahasuerus to contrive the ruin of the Jews, and bidden to honor the Jew Mordecai (*Esther* vi), — interesting to read, but how much more interesting to see! The dialogue between Haman and the King, in which neither comprehends the drift of the other, while we, comprehending both, are all agog for the issue, is a situation essentially dramatic. The feeling can be suggested by telling about it; but how much more impressive it would be if expressed visibly! This instance is the more in point because medieval drama presented scenes from the Bible, and from those scenes which were essentially dramatic learned something of the ways of drama. A dramatic situation, then, is a scene in which the feeling is visibly expressed in some decisive and

significant action enjoyed by an audience. Drama is made up of such situations as are best expressed by actors before an audience. It is made to be seen.

Nothing that lacks this particular appeal is really dramatic. Aside from the skill of the actors, on which, of course, every play depends more or less, the merit of a play is fairly measured by its hold upon the people who see it. From its very origin, drama has always been in this sense popular. It arises spontaneously from a natural love of acting. In the childhood of civilization the instinct for acting still seen in children was applied to certain popular observances of religion. Greek drama began in the rites celebrated annually by the whole village to honor Dionysus, the god of fertility and enthusiasm. In the shouting, singing chorus there were at first no actors in the modern sense; but that was because in a broader sense all were actors in a rude impromptu. There was probably a good deal of improvised verse by individuals and a good deal of recurring refrain by the whole crowd (see page 237). Out of this communal impersonation at the vintage of the story of Dionysus grew naturally impersonations by individuals of the god and his more prominent mythical attendants, the crowd responding with impromptu variations of the familiar refrain. Every crowd produces a leader. The leader of the Greek chorus became an actor in the modern sense of taking a fixed part. In time other fixed parts were assigned to individuals, till the mimic action had a definite dialogue; but the chorus persisted as representative of the whole community.

Medieval drama began afresh, without derivation from classical models, and in a society centuries beyond the Greek village chorus. But though its rise is therefore different in some respects, it is strikingly like in certain essentials. Medieval society, different enough otherwise, was similar in

communal religious observance and in general ignorance of reading. The medieval community center was the church; and the drama arose,[1] not by any popular action indeed, but from the communal observance of the great annual Church festivals. "Whom seek ye?" came the thrilling chant at Easter, when the whole village or city district would be gathered in the parish church; and then, in further response, "He is not here; He is risen." To make this interlude more impressive, the clergy had it chanted responsively by singers impersonating the angel and the women. So at Christmas there were responses of the angels and the shepherds. These so effectively answered the popular feeling that in time other scenes from the sacred history were thus recited; the custom passed out of the church; and at York, at Chester, and at two or three other centers the whole community, through its trade-guilds, maintained an annual series of dramatic representations, setting all the main scenes of the Bible. Each scene, provided by a separate guild, was mounted on a cart and drawn to the market-place before the church, where the spectators were assembled in the open air. *Miracles*, these series were called, as representing the most dramatic scenes of Revelation; or *mysteries*, as representing the supernatural truths of the creed. Medieval drama, then, began as a popular performance, not communal in composition, but developed in response to a popular demand, and always answerable to the people.

Filling the market-place in the fine weather of Whitsuntide or Corpus Christi, the medieval community saw the masons, perhaps, give Cain and Abel, the tanners give Abraham and Isaac, the tilers give Noah's Ark, and so on through a procession of Bible history. The scenes represented thus in

[1] The distinct influence of the few folk-plays seems not important enough for separate discussion.

procession were not tableaux; they were definite dialogue learned and acted. Further the composition did not usually go; but to that extent the miracles were drama. There was no unity binding the whole series; with striking exceptions, there was no binding unity even of a single part; but there was always dialogue and action. The first additional dramatic effect was reached by the development of characterization. Interpreted by natural gesture and action, a part demanded further expression in words; and this the unknown medieval playwrights supplied. The Brome *Abraham and Isaac*, for instance, may fairly be called a play because it has such dramatic realization as comes from expanding the representation of character. The Bible story says merely:

> And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering. So they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. *Genesis* xxii, 6–10.

The writer of the Brome play expands throughout in the following manner:[1]

[1] The quotation is from the modernized text in *The Second Shepherd's Play, Everyman, and Other Early Plays*, translated, with an introduction and notes, by Clarence Griffin Child (Boston and New York, Riverside Literature Series).

ABRAHAM

Rise up, my child, and fast come hither,
My gentle bairn that art so wise,
For we two, child, must go together,
And unto my Lord make sacrifice.

ISAAC

I am full ready, father. Lo!
Given to your hands, I stand right here,
And whatsoever ye bid me do, even so
It shall be done with glad cheer,
Full well and fine.

ABRAHAM

Ah, Isaac, mine own son so dear,
God's blessing I give thee, and mine.
Hold this fagot upon thy back,
And I myself here fire shall bring.

ISAAC

Father, all this here will I pack.
I am full fain to do your bidding.

ABRAHAM

Ah, Lord of Heaven, my hands I wring;
This child's words wring like death my heart!

So the dialogue goes on to the crisis, which gives even more play to feeling.

ISAAC

I pray you, father, let me know the truth,
Whether I shall have any harm or no.

ABRAHAM

Not yet may I tell thee, sweet son, in sooth,
My heart is now so full of woe.

ISAAC

Dear father, I pray you, hide it not from me,
But some of your thought tell ye me, your son.

ABRAHAM

Ah, Isaac, Isaac, I must kill thee!

ISAAC

Kill me, father? Alas, what have I done!
If in aught I have trespassed against you, God wot,
With a rod ye may make me full mild —
And with your sharp sword kill me not,
For in truth, father, I am but a child.

ABRAHAM

I am full sorry, son, thy blood to spill,
But truly, my child, it is not as I please.

ISAAC

Now would to God my mother were here on this hill!
She would kneel for me on both her knees
To save my life.
And since that my mother is not here,
Change your look, I pray you, father dear,
And kill me not with your knife.

To this extent the miracle plays developed dramatic characterization. Noah's wife became a comic character from the hint of her being loth to enter the ark; Herod became a furious ranter; and there are many finer touches worthy to stand beside the Brome writer's Abraham. Finest of all, perhaps, is the address in the York *Nativity* of Mary to the new-born Prince of Peace, which must stand in its original poetry:

Nowe in my sawle grete ioie haue I.
I am all cladde in comforte clere.
Now will be borne of my body
Both God and man togedir in feere.[1]
Bliste mott he be!
Jesu! my son that is so dere!
now borne is he!
Hayle my lord God! hayle prince of pees!
Hayle my fadir! and hayle my sone!
Hayle souereyne sege [2] all synnes to sesse![3]
Hayle God and man in erth to wonne! [4]
Hayle thurgh whos myht
All this worlde was first begonne,
merknes [5] and light!
Sone, as I am sympill sugett [6] of thyne,
Vowchesaffe, swete sone, I pray the,
That I myght the take in the armys of myne,
And in this poure wede [7] to arraie the.
Graunte me thi blisse,
As I am thy modir chosen to be
in sothfastnesse.

In structure the medieval drama did not generally advance. Even after the middle age the conditions of presentation generally hindered English drama in structural development. But there are striking exceptions, most striking, perhaps what is known as the *Secunda Pastorum*, or Second Shepherds' Play, of the so-called Towneley Cycle. In putting on the stage the shepherds who heard the angels and adored the Holy Child the writers of miracle plays were working with familiar characters. For in the frank medieval way the Syrian herdsmen were made English shepherds; and in characterizing them the playwrights naturally pleased the

[1] in company. [3] cease, stop. [5] darkness. [7] clothing.
[2] seat, throne. [4] dwell. [6] subject.

audience with English rustic manners and dialogue, and thus with rustic repartee. Of the two shepherd scenes one became an English comedy. The Towneley writer, surely a man of strong dramatic sense, made it a comedy indeed by giving it a coherent plot of its own. Without a hint from Scripture, this little comic story develops a dramatic complication and solution, and a dramatic reaction of character on character, that make it a unified and coherent one-act play. Other exceptions, though less marked, show that the writing of miracle plays sometimes awakened a sense of dramatic structure; but in general the medieval drama learned little of play-writing beyond dramatic characterization.

Thus the middle age touched, at least, in verse and prose all the primary forms of story-telling. Some it developed; and of these some have endured and others have long been antiquated. Some it hardly more than guessed. But in what it tried and in what it proved it reveals those primary human interests which feed the roots of literature.

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